

# From Franco-American to American: The Case of Sainte-Famille, an Assimilating Parish of Lewiston, Maine

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*While many studies have focused on the migration, settlement, and community formation of French-Canadian immigrants in the United States, we know little about the history of their Franco-American descendants in the twentieth century. Through the vehicle of the parish study, we can explore the continuing struggle between survivance and assimilation. An examination of the Sainte-Famille parish in Lewiston, Maine, sheds light on the assimilation of Franco-Americans into U.S. society over the course of the twentieth century. In particular, it highlights the role of the parish in promoting assimilation.*

*Si de nombreuses études ont mis l'accent sur la migration, le peuplement et le regroupement communautaire des immigrants Canadiens français aux États-Unis, nous connaissons peu l'histoire de leurs descendants franco-américains au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'étude des paroisses nous permet d'explorer la lutte constante entre la survie et l'assimilation. Un examen de la paroisse Sainte-Famille de Lewiston, dans le Maine, nous éclaire sur l'assimilation des Franco-Américains par la société américaine au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il met particulièrement en lumière le rôle de la paroisse dans la promotion d'assimilation.*

STUDIES HAVE TOLD us much about the migration, settlement, and formation of ethnic communities by French-Canadian immigrants in the United States. Yet we still know very little about the experiences of their Franco-American descendants after the early decades of the twentieth century. In particular, we know scarcely anything about the continuing struggle between *survivance* (preservation of French-Canadian culture) and assimila-

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tion. One way to gather this information is through the vehicle of the parish history, which provides a manageable case study for exploring a particular community and the institutions it created. The parish history offers us a window through which to view a Franco-American population over time. By examining the history of the Sainte-Famille parish of Lewiston, Maine, for example, we can learn how Franco-American men, women, and their families changed over the course of the twentieth century; we can gain insight into the development and decline of Franco-American credit unions, parochial schools, and parish religious societies; moreover, we can trace the process by which Franco-Americans assimilated into U.S. society.

The first stage of assimilation can be regarded as acculturation, and it occurs when an ethnic group changes its cultural patterns and adopts those of the host society. Other stages involve the loss of an ethnic group's identity and its extensive intermixing with the host culture. Since the colonial period in U.S. history, Anglo-Saxons have functioned as the host society and have conveyed their expectation that immigrants adopt the English language and culture. Thus, assimilation in the United States has entailed both the use of English and subsequent decline of native languages by immigrants and their ethnic churches; it has also led to the loss of national identities by immigrant groups and the institutions they created in the country.<sup>1</sup> As a "community study", the history of Sainte-Famille tells us a great deal about the assimilation of Franco-Americans over the course of the twentieth century.

From the mid-nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth, nearly one million French Canadians migrated to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Most settled relatively close to home in the textile-producing centres of the Northeast, including Lewiston and Biddeford in Maine, Manchester in New Hampshire, Lowell and Fall River in Massachusetts, Woonsocket in Rhode Island, the mill towns of the Quinebaug River Valley in Connecticut, and Cohoes in New York.<sup>3</sup> By the early twentieth century, people of French-Canadian descent constituted a sizeable proportion of the population of the

1 Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 70–71; Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1975), pp. 1–9, 139–147.

2 François Weil, *Les Franco-Américains, 1860–1980* ([Paris]: Belin, 1989), p. 9. Throughout the article, "French Canadians" or *Canadiens* refer to the Québécois and to French-speaking Canadian immigrants who came to the United States in the nineteenth century. "Franco-Americans" refers to twentieth-century individuals of French-Canadian descent living in the United States; they began calling themselves Franco-Americans around the turn of the century, as noted by Weil, pp. 177–178.

3 In Lewiston, as in other emerging New England cities like Woonsocket and Manchester, first Yankee women, then the Irish, and later the French Canadians successively dominated the work forces of the textile mills. On Woonsocket and Manchester, respectively, see Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

American Northeast. In Lewiston in 1930, for example, they made up an estimated 65 per cent of the city's approximately 35,000 residents.<sup>4</sup>

Lewiston was therefore a major Franco-American community in the state of Maine and the region of New England. With its nine cotton and five woolen mills in 1872, Lewiston had become Maine's leading textile centre, and it essentially remained a one-industry town until the mid-1900s. Many Franco-Americans found employment in Lewiston's textile mills, the largest of which were the Bates, Androscoggin, and Hill mills. They also found work in the shoe factories of Auburn, Lewiston's sister city, but lived primarily in Lewiston.<sup>5</sup> A fuller understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States calls for studies of important Franco cities like Lewiston, particularly to examine the twentieth-century integration of Franco-Americans into U.S. society.

To Lewiston, as to other industrializing cities of the Northeast, *les Canadiens* brought their French language, Roman Catholic faith, and French-Canadian traditions. To preserve these essential elements of their identity, they established tight-knit neighbourhoods known as *petits Canadas* and founded national parishes. Because they promoted ethnic identity and cohesion, these parish communities ran into conflicts with Irish prelates who favoured rapid assimilation as a response to hostility towards Catholic immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the efforts of the Irish bishop, Louis Walsh, to create territorial (or mixed) parishes in Lewiston in the 1920s, demography enabled individuals of French-Canadian descent to establish four of the city's six parishes as francophone institutions.

One of these parishes, Sainte-Famille, was founded in 1923, during a decade in which a large wave of French Canadians migrated to the United States.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of three portraits of this parish community allows us

4 Laureat Odilon Bernard, "A Political History of Lewiston, Maine (1930-39)" (Master's thesis, University of Maine, Orono, 1949), p. 6; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population*, I, p. 472.

5 N. Dingley, Jr., *Historical Sketch of Lewiston* (Lewiston, Maine: Lewiston Journal, [1872]), p. 15; James S. Leamon, *Historic Lewiston: A Textile City in Transition* (Auburn, Maine: Lewiston Historical Commission, 1976), pp. v, 30, 43; Yves Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté canadienne-française en Nouvelle-Angleterre : Lewiston, Maine, 1800-1880" (Ph.D. thesis, Université Laval, Québec, 1988), p. 204; Edmund S. Hoyt, comp., *Maine State Year-Book and Legislative Manual, for the Year 1872* (Portland, Maine: Hoyt, Fogg & Breed, 1871), pp. 168-169; A. M. Myhrman and J. A. Rademaker, "The Second Colonization Process in an Industrial Community" (typescript, Lewiston Public Library, n.d.), p. 34.

6 On conflicts between Franco-Americans and their Irish bishops in the New England states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, see Yves Roby, *Les Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre (1776-1930)* (Sillery, Quebec: Septentrion, 1990), pp. 162-180, 290-330. On a major struggle between Maine's Franco-Americans and Bishop Louis Walsh, see Michael Guignard, "Maine's Corporation Sole Controversy", *Maine Historical Society Newsletter*, vol. 12 (Winter 1973), pp. 113-126.

7 According to Roby (*Les Franco-Américains*, p. 273), 130,000 French Canadians migrated to the United States during the 1920s, many of them between 1923 and 1926.

to trace the evolution of its Franco-American population. The portraits are of Sainte-Famille's original parishioners from the 1920s to the 1940s, its communicants at the middle point in its history in the 1950s and 1960s, and its present members.

### **The Original Parishioners: The 1920s–1940s**

The federal manuscript census for 1920 provides a wealth of information on the original parishioners of Sainte-Famille.<sup>8</sup> The census reveals that, with the exception of a small proportion of non-French families and the pastor and Mother Superior, who were natives of France, Sainte-Famille's founding parishioners were Franco-Americans of the Quebec diaspora.<sup>9</sup> Over one-third were first-generation migrants, and most of these French-Canadian immigrants had entered the United States after the turn of the century.<sup>10</sup> Census data also indicate that the original parishioners were largely young and that a number of them had sizeable families of up to eleven members.

According to the census, well over 80 per cent of Sainte-Famille's working men and women held blue-collar jobs in 1920 (see Table 1), and the textile and shoe industries employed most of the parish's founding members (see Table 2). This concentration of Sainte-Famille's population in industrial jobs was significant to Franco-American history in general, because it was a pattern evident among Franco-Americans throughout the northeastern

8 Data from the following sources were cross-linked to locate, in the *U.S. Census, 1920*, about one-third of the 282 original parish families (the figure reported in Lewiston's French newspaper, *Le Messenger*, January 24, 1927, p. 1): Baptism Register, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, November 13 – December 25, 1940; Death Register, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, March 15, 1924 – December 31, 1967; *Resident and Business Directory of Androscoggin County, Maine* (Auburn, Maine: Merrill and Webber Company, 1920); *Directory of Androscoggin County, Maine* (Portland, Maine: Portland Directory Company, 1922, 1924, 1926; Portland, Maine: Fred L. Tower Companies, 1928); Ange Marie Begin, O.P., comp., *Marriages of St. Peter & Paul, Lewiston, Maine (1869–1979)* (Lewiston, Maine: Dominican Fathers, n.d.); Youville Labonte, comp., *The Necrology of St. Peter and Paul's Cemetery, 1870–1976, Lewiston, Maine*, 2 vols. (Auburn, Maine: Youville Labonte, n.d.); Youville Labonte, comp., *Marriages of St. Ann, Lisbon, Maine (1885–1977) and of St. Mary, Lewiston, Maine (1907–1977)* (Auburn, Maine: Youville Labonte, n.d.); Youville Labonte, comp., *Marriages of Auburn, Maine, 1902–1977* (Auburn, Maine: Youville Labonte, n.d.); Youville Labonte, comp., *Marriages of Holy Cross, Lewiston, Maine (1923–1977) and of Holy Family, Lewiston, Maine (1923–1977)* (Auburn, Maine: Youville Labonte, n.d.); Youville Labonte, comp., *Marriages of St. Joseph, Lewiston, ME (1858–1978)* (Auburn, Maine: Youville Labonte, n.d.). The author thanks Lorraine Y. Bard, former Deputy City Clerk, Lewiston, Maine, for providing vital statistics on a number of the original parishioners who could not be located in the sources cited above.

9 There was little anglicizing of French names in Lewiston. References in this article to Franco-American and non-Franco persons depended upon whether or not the individual had a French surname or maiden name.

10 The number of tables in this article has been limited to avoid burdening the text. Readers interested in viewing compilations of the quantitative data mentioned throughout the article are urged to consult the tables in Mark Paul Richard, "Out of 'Little Canada': The Assimilation of Sainte-Famille Parish, Lewiston, Maine (1923–1994)" (Master's thesis, University of Maine, Orono, 1994), from which these tables are drawn.

**Table 1 Occupational Distribution of Male and Female Parishioners in 1920, 1950s–1960s, and 1989–1994 (in percentages<sup>1</sup>)**

Category	1920 (%)	1950s–60s (%)	1989–94 (%)
<b>Men</b>			
<i>Professional</i>			
Self-employed	0	0.9	1.0
Salaried	0	0.9	7.9
<i>White-collar</i>			
Small business and managerial	9.6	9.9	20.7
Clerical, sales, service	6.4	23.8	19.2
<i>Blue-collar</i>			
Transportation, construction, non-industrial	21.3	30.4	35.5
Industrial	62.8	32.8	15.4
<i>Farming and lumbering</i>	0	1.5	0.4
<b>Women</b>			
<i>Professional</i>			
Self-employed	0	0	0.1
Salaried	0	3.3	15.2
<i>White-collar</i>			
Small business and managerial	0	3.3	11.9
Clerical, sales, service	13.3	25.6	55.7
<i>Blue-collar</i>			
Transportation, construction, non-industrial	0	4.4	4.5
Industrial	86.7	63.3	12.5
<i>Farming and lumbering</i>	0	0	0

1) Columns may not add up to 100.0% because of rounding.

*Sources:* Data for 1920 derived from the *U.S. Census, 1920* (for men, N = 94; for women, N = 30); data for 1950s–60s derived from Lewiston city directories, 1954–1962 (for men, N = 467; for women N = 90); data for 1989–94 derived from Holy Family parish census information forms collected from 1989 to 1994 (for men, N = 929; for women, N = 863).

United States. It was also significant to the family economies of parishioners in particular, for the textile mills and shoe shops of Lewiston and Auburn paid relatively low wages to their employees.

Census data on citizenship status and English-speaking ability reflect the cultural transition taking place among Sainte-Famille's Franco-Americans. Slightly over 70 per cent of the future members of Sainte-Famille were U.S. citizens by 1920, and 73 per cent of the original parishioners reportedly spoke English.<sup>11</sup> Data from the federal census, therefore, demonstrate a significant measure of acculturation on the part of this Franco-American population.

The data also suggest that women were the family members most likely

<sup>11</sup> The proportion of parishioners speaking English may actually have been higher. Census-takers inconsistently reported English-speaking ability, in most cases leaving the item blank for native-born American citizens and for young children.

**Table 2 Occupational Distribution of Parishioners Employed in the Textile and Shoe Industries in 1920, 1950s–1960s, and 1989–1994 (in percentages<sup>1</sup>)**

Category	1920		1950s–60s		1989–94	
	Textile (%)	Shoe (%)	Textile (%)	Shoe (%)	Textile (%)	Shoe (%)
<b>Men</b>						
<i>White-collar</i>						
Small business <sup>2</sup> and managerial	1.1	1.1	0.2	0.2	0.5	1.0
Clerical, sales, service	1.1	2.1	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1
<i>Blue-collar</i>						
Construction and non-industrial	2.1	0	0.4	0	0	0.2
Industrial	31.9	30.8	13.1	13.3	1.1	3.2
Total	36.2	34.0	14.1	13.7	1.7	4.5
Total in both industries		70.2		27.8		6.2
<b>Women</b>						
<i>White-collar</i>						
Managerial	0	0	0	0	0.3	0.5
Clerical, sales, service	0	3.3	1.1	1.1	0.1	0.5
<i>Blue-collar</i>						
Construction and non-industrial	0	0	0	0	0	0
Industrial	60.0	23.3	33.3	27.8	0.9	5.2
Total	60.0	26.6	34.4	28.9	1.3	6.2
Total in both industries		86.6		63.3		7.5

1) Percentages are of the total number of male or female parishioners participating in the labour force during the given time period.

2) The small business designation used here permits the inclusion of a cobbler working for himself in 1920.

*Sources:* Data for 1920 derived from the *U.S. Census, 1920* (for men, N = 94; for women, N = 30); data for 1950s–60s derived from Lewiston city directories, 1954–1962 (for men, N = 467; for women, N = 90); data for 1989–94 derived from Holy Family parish census information forms collected from 1989 to 1994 (for men, N = 929; for women, N = 863).

to ensure the survival of the French language and, by extension, of French-Canadian traditions. Among Sainte-Famille's future parishioners, non-English-speaking women outnumbered men by more than two to one. Considered in light of the evidence that the men were three times more likely to participate in the labour force than the women and, particularly, that only a few mothers worked, it appears that working or getting out of the home was an important element in the acculturation of Franco-Americans. Yet employment in the textile industry, where 60 per cent of Sainte-Famille's working women laboured in 1920, might have helped the women preserve their French. As one of Sainte-Famille's original parishioners

recalled, it “was all French in the mill”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, both the small percentage of married women employed and their concentration in the textile industry may have promoted cultural survival at Sainte-Famille during the early years of the parish’s history.

During Sainte-Famille’s formative decades the development of its institutions revealed elements of both Franco-American cultural survival as well as acculturation to the United States. The parish religious societies, school, and credit union reinforced religious and ethnic traditions; simultaneously, the activities of the school and credit union reflected elements of anglicization. From the 1920s to the 1940s, parishioners of Sainte-Famille could maintain their ethnic identity while beginning or continuing the process of acculturation.

Formed during Sainte-Famille’s first decade to bring cohesion to the new parish and to work for the greater good of the parish community, *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* (for married women), *l’Association Saint-Joseph* (for adult men), and *les Enfants de Marie* (for single women) promoted religiosity and Franco-American ethnicity. For example, *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* and *l’Association Saint-Joseph* would gather at wakes and funeral masses to offer communal prayers for deceased members. At the funeral parlour, they would recite the rosary together in French on bended knee. As evidence of their solidarity, members of the men’s and women’s societies wore their insignia to wakes and funeral masses and displayed their banners at church services. During the year, using money collected primarily from dues, they paid for masses for the departed and held a special annual mass for all of their deceased members.<sup>13</sup>

A former member of *les Enfants de Marie* recalled having to participate in a particularly colourful ritual. Theresa Marcotte related that, when she was married at Sainte-Famille Chapel/School in the mid-1940s, her bridal party had to include two representatives from *les Enfants de Marie*. After walking down the aisle, she proceeded to the statue of Mary with these representatives, knelt in front of the Blessed Virgin, and read a statement in French indicating her intention to leave the association of *les Enfants de Marie* to become a bride. As she explained, “I had to renounce myself as an *Enfant de Marie* in order to become a wife.” The bride and the representatives of the society then returned to the altar, and the wedding began.<sup>14</sup>

12 *U.S. Census, 1920*; interview with Lucia Jutras, Lewiston, Maine, August 7, 1993.

13 *10ème anniversaire de la paroisse Ste-Famille de Lewiston* (s.é. [1934]), p. 9; interview with Juliette Lajoie Chenard, who joined *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* in 1926 and served as its president from 1943 to 1957, Auburn, Maine, August 14, 1993; M<sup>me</sup> Laurent (Juliette) Lajoie Chenard, “Cinquantième anniversaire de la Congrégation des Dames de Sainte Anne, Paroisse Sainte Famille, Lewiston, Maine” (typescript, 1981), p. 2; interview with Wilfrid T. Marcoux, who joined *l’Association Saint-Joseph* in 1936 and served as its secretary in the 1980s and early 1990s, Lewiston, Maine, August 25, 1993.

14 Interview with Theresa Marcotte, Auburn, Maine, August 14, 1993. Anthropologist Horace Miner noted the observance of this ritual, performed in almost exactly the same way, by *les Enfants de*

In addition to participating in various religious rites, the parish societies engaged in activities that promoted Franco-American ethnicity. In 1935, for instance, a number of sodalists had roles in the three-act play, *À la Grace de Dieu*, performed to raise funds for the new church the parish one day hoped to build. In the early 1930s, when *Le Messenger* named the Franco-American groups marching in local Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parades in honour of the patron saint of French Canadians, the list always included *l'Association Saint-Joseph* of Saint-Famille parish.<sup>15</sup> In short, through the production of French plays, celebrations of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, the use of French at their meetings, and participation in communal religious activities, *les Dames de Sainte-Anne*, *les Enfants de Marie*, and *l'Association Saint-Joseph* helped Sainte-Famille parish to maintain its religious and cultural traditions during its early years.

So did *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* through their work with students at Sainte-Famille School. They organized French plays and musicals which students performed for parishioners and, on occasion, in competition with other Franco-American schools in Lewiston at such events as *le Festival de la Bonne Chanson*. The Sisters also entered students in competitive French composition exams and French spelling bees, and they awarded French as well as English diplomas to graduates.<sup>16</sup>

While promoting maintenance of the French language, the Sisters concurrently worked to facilitate the acculturation of their Franco-American students by providing only one hour of French instruction daily, beginning in 1926, the year that they arrived at Sainte-Famille. As a matter of philosophy, *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* did not believe in the oft-repeated saying, “Qui perd sa langue, perd sa foi,” and they “felt children must first meet the language of the culture”, explained Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin. Given that three-quarters of the Sisters missioned at Sainte-Famille through the 1940s had been born in the United States, this apparently was an important consid-

*Marie* of Saint-Denis Parish, Quebec, in the mid-1930s. Miner, *St. Denis: A French-Canadian Parish* (1939; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 215.

15 Scrapbook of Mrs. Juliette Lajoie Chenard, 1935–1959, Ladies of Saint Ann Sodality, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine (hereafter LSA Scrapbook); *Le Messenger*, June 26, 1931, p. 3; June 24, 1932, p. 1; June 21, 1933, p. 1.

16 Archives du provincialat des Soeurs de Saint-Joseph, Winslow, Maine, *Journal de la maison*, Couvent de la Sainte-Famille, Lewiston, Maine, February 1926 – December 1965 (hereafter, *Journal des Soeurs*, 1926–1965), May 19, 1940, pp. 26–27; May 10, 1945, p. 39; May 5, 1946, p. 46; *Lewiston Daily Sun*, May 20, 1940, p. 3; May 6, 1946, p. 6; interview with Claire Lagace, Lewiston, Maine, August 18, 1993; *Le Messenger*, May 20, 1940, p.8; March 20, 1946, p. 6; May 6, 1946, pp. 3, 6; June 10, 1946, p. 6; interview with Jacqueline LeTendre, Lewiston, Maine, August 25, 1993; interview with Sr. Yvonne Binette, C.S.J., who taught at Sainte-Famille School from 1937 until 1951, Winslow, Maine, August 6, 1993; interview with Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin, C.S.J., who graduated from Sainte-Famille in 1936 and served as its principal from 1959 to 1961, Winslow, Maine, August 6, 1993. Lagace and LeTendre, both former students of Sainte-Famille School, participated actively in the choir as well as in various dramatic and musical productions organized by the Sisters.



eration for the order. The Sisters also wanted to prepare students to pass Lewiston High School's English entrance exam, and they were concerned that students were ridiculed in high school for their French accents and for difficulties they had with the English language.<sup>17</sup>

Other factors undoubtedly influenced the decision of the Sisters to teach in French for only one hour each day. Sainte-Famille School opened at a time when xenophobic tensions were high in the country and nativists were pushing to Americanize immigrant populations. The Maine state legislature had passed a law in 1919 requiring the use of English as "the basic language of instruction", and, more than two years before the school opened, Bishop Louis Walsh had informed *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* from other missions in Maine that they had to comply with this legislation. Neither the pastor nor the parish community, it appeared, were opposed to the amount of English instruction offered at Sainte-Famille. The pastor did not want students' French to handicap them as they pursued secondary and higher education, according to Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin. Parishioners, who worked primarily in the textile mills and shoe factories of Lewiston and Auburn, likely viewed English instruction as a precondition to the upward occupational mobility of their children; a number may even have pushed the use of English at Sainte-Famille School and in their homes. Those who wanted children to maintain their French had little cause for concern, Roger Bissonnette pointed out, because "there wasn't the danger for loss of language as there is now. Everyone with Canadian ancestors living in the area could speak French." The Sisters, therefore, did not teach for half a day in French as did many other Franco-American parochial schools throughout New England prior to mid-century.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, they served as agents of acculturation at Sainte-Famille parish.

*Les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* did meet some local opposition, however. *Le Messenger*, which was trying to preserve the French language in Lewiston, complained that Sainte-Famille School was not placing French instruction on the same footing as English instruction. Franco-American children, the newspaper contended, should first learn French well and then learn English. The Sisters' practice of teaching more in English than in French at Sainte-

17 Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin, August 6, 1993; Sr. Yvonne Binette, August 6, 1993; interview with Roger Bissonnette, who attended Sainte-Famille School from 1926 to 1933, Lewiston, Maine, August 17, 1993; Claire Lagace, August 18, 1993; Archives of the Provincialate of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Winslow, Maine, "Sisters' Register: Sisters Who Have Been Missioned to Holy Family Convent, Lewiston, Maine", index cards, supplemented with data provided by the late Sr. Germaine Bernier, C.S.J., archivist, who consulted the congregation's profession book for places of birth missing from the Register; *U.S. Census, 1920*.

18 Maine, *Acts and Resolves as Passed by the Seventy-Ninth Legislature* (1919), ch. 146; Chancery Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Maine, Diary of Bishop Louis S. Walsh, October 23, 1923; Gerard J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 75.

Famille was inconsistent with what other local parish schools were doing, it argued.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, Sainte-Famille was moving faster than Lewiston's other francophone parishes in acculturating Franco-Americans.

The cultural transition taking place among parishioners during Sainte-Famille's early years, which the 1920 federal census reveals and *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* promoted, also was evident at Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union, the first parish credit union in the state of Maine. From its founding in 1938, the credit union's minutes were written in English, and its annual reports generally emphasized English, while its board meetings and annual meetings with the membership were held in French.<sup>20</sup> Thus, information on Sainte-Famille's important institutions during their early decades suggests that communicants had the opportunity to begin or to continue the acculturation process without completely giving up their French language and cultural identity.

Historian John F. McClymer has argued that ethnicity and assimilation (of which the first stage is acculturation) do not necessarily represent dichotomous behaviours which cannot be pursued simultaneously. In his view, if the unit of analysis is the group rather than the individual, assimilation need not be viewed as the loss of ethnicity. Assimilation instead can be represented by an ethnic group's participation in and commitment to American society. As an example, he pointed to the actions of French-Canadian immigrants who, between the Civil War and World War I, erected national churches, became naturalized, and voted. Because they maintained their ethnic identity while becoming increasingly involved in American society, ethnicity actually served as a tool of assimilation for these French Canadians, he contended. By extension, McClymer's argument suggests that an ethnic parish like Sainte-Famille could pursue the dual role of encouraging both ethnicity and assimilation.<sup>21</sup>

### **Parishioners at Mid-History: The 1950s and 1960s**

Following the Second World War, many young Franco-American families left Lewiston's in-town parishes to build their own homes in the outlying

19 *Le Messenger*, December 26, 1935, p. 6.

20 Interview with Ronald J. Fournier, president/chief executive officer of the credit union, Lewiston, Maine, July 15, 1993; Maine Family Federal Credit Union, Lewiston, Maine, *Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union Second Annual Report, Year Ending December 31st, 1939* and "Tenth Anniversary Program, Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union, 1938-1948"; Roger Bissonnette, August 17, 1993; interview with Maurice H. Fontaine, who joined the credit union in 1945 and served as president from 1958 to 1986 and (when titles changed) as chairman of the board of directors from 1986 to 1991, Lewiston, Maine, July 15, 1993. The French name of the parish credit union appears without hyphenation, reflecting the spelling used on its Organization Certificate as well as the practice of the institution.

21 John F. McClymer, "The Paradox of Ethnicity in the United States: The French-Canadian experience in Worcester, 1870-1914" in Michael D'Innocenzo and Josef P. Sirefman, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society — "Melting Pot" or "Salad Bowl"?* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 15-23.

parish of Sainte-Famille. At mid-century, the pastor and his assistant continued to celebrate masses in Latin and to preach the sermons in French. Naturally, Sainte-Famille's communicants were still almost all of French-Canadian descent during the middle period of the parish's history.<sup>22</sup>

From Sainte-Famille's origin to the mid-1950s and early 1960s, parishioners had continued their assimilation into U.S. society. Impressionistic evidence suggested that first-generation parishioners had become naturalized citizens of the United States by the end of World War II.<sup>23</sup> The postwar migration of young, Franco-American families from *petit Canada*, Lewiston's ethnic enclave, had encouraged the intermixing of these new communicants with non-Franco-Americans living within the parish territory.<sup>24</sup>

So had the decline of Lewiston's textile industry in the 1950s. Parishioners moving out of the textile mills into jobs other than those provided by the shoe shops, where labourers also spoke French, frequently had to intermix with other ethnic groups and to speak English, particularly if they held white-collar positions.<sup>25</sup> Upward mobility, in part due to discrimination by local employers, necessitated changing the language that many continued to speak at home, at church, at work, and, indeed, throughout much of Lewiston. Structural changes in Lewiston's manufacturing industry, therefore, served to promote the upward mobility and assimilation of Sainte-Famille's francophone community, threatening its cultural survival.

Occupational data generated from Lewiston city directories reveal that, while male parishioners had enjoyed some vertical occupational mobility since 1920, they continued to hold primarily blue-collar jobs at mid-century (see Table 1). Local textile mills and shoe shops employed over one-quarter of Sainte-Famille's men (see Table 2). Interestingly, the data reflect that

22 Interview with Reverend Roger J. Ouellette, assistant pastor of Sainte-Famille from 1948 to 1962, Waterville, Maine, August 24, 1993; Pauline F. Caron, "Holy Family Church, Lewiston", *Lewiston Daily Sun*, January 8, 1966, p. 5. Baptism and death registers from 1956 to 1960 identified over 60% of the 953 families registered in the parish in 1960. Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, Baptism Register, April 23, 1951 – September 17, 1967; Holy Family Death Register, 1924–1967; Chancery Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Maine, Holy Family Parish *Annual Report*, January 1, 1960 – December 31, 1960.

23 This is what Rev. Ouellette found when he arrived at Sainte-Famille in the late 1940s. Providing support (albeit narrow-based support) for his observation is an examination of the dozen or so extant voter registration cards of Sainte-Famille's original parishioners, which revealed that nearly all who had become naturalized had done so by the end of the Second World War. Rev. Roger J. Ouellette, August 24, 1993; City Clerk's Office, Lewiston, Maine, Voter Registration Cards.

24 Incidentally, it also increased the ethnic concentration of the parish. By mid-century, for example, the percentage of Franco-American households on Sabattus Street, for one-half mile on either side of Sainte-Famille Church, had more than doubled. James Paul Allen, "Catholics in Maine: A Social Geography" (Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1970), pp. 273, 273n, 274n; *U.S. Census, 1920; Manning's Lewiston Auburn (Maine) Directory*, vol. 58 (Boston: H. A. Manning Co., 1958).

25 Jacqueline P. Boucher (LeTendre), "The Franco-American in Lewiston" (Senior thesis, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, 1956), p. 28; James H. Parker, "The Assimilation of French Americans", *Human Organization*, vol. 38 (Fall 1979), p. 311.

parish men had enjoyed no upward mobility in either industry from the early decades of the century to the mid-1950s or early 1960s.<sup>26</sup> Any vertical mobility experienced by these parishioners clearly took place outside the two industries which gave Lewiston and Auburn their reputation as the “Industrial Heart of Maine”. In an area where banks were known to have only one Franco-American among their managerial ranks, it was likely that the textile mills and shoe factories of the Twin Cities also discriminated against francophones when filling supervisory positions.

By mid-century, the proportion of Sainte-Famille’s women participating in the labour force had decreased, and, like the male parishioners, the women worked primarily in blue-collar occupations (see Table 1). Sainte-Famille’s women, however, were twice as likely as the men to hold industrial jobs, and the textile and shoe industries employed almost two-thirds of them (see Table 2). Because of the decline of the textile industry, they were divided almost evenly between the mills and shoe shops by mid-century. As with the men, Franco-American women of the parish had experienced no vertical occupational mobility in either industry since the founding of Sainte-Famille.<sup>27</sup>

Although Sainte-Famille remained a working-class parish, it had gained economic strength since its founding. For example, Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union in 1958 became the first in Maine to have more than one million dollars in assets; in the following year, it moved out of the home of the parishioners who managed it and into its own building on land purchased from the parish, thereby becoming the first credit union in the state to construct its own quarters. The completion of the new church in 1960, with an exterior of Indiana limestone and interior of marble floors and wainscoting, also signalled the presence of more money in the parish. In addition, at the mid-point of Sainte-Famille’s history, nearly half of the communicants owned their residences, compared with 21 per cent in 1920.<sup>28</sup> Thus the financial situation of parishioners had improved since the third decade of the century.

26 Holy Family Baptism Register, 1951–1967; Holy Family Death Register, 1924–1967; *Manning’s Lewiston Auburn (Maine) Directory*, vols. 54–58 (Boston: H. A. Manning Co., 1954, 1956, 1958; Springfield, Mass.: H. A. Manning Co., 1960; Greenfield, Mass.: H. A. Manning Co., 1962); *U.S. Census, 1920*.

27 Whereas the ratio of working women to working men was about one to three in 1920, it was roughly one to five by the mid-1950s and early 1960s. *U.S. Census, 1920*; Lewiston city directories, 1954–1962. Lewiston’s textile industry declined rapidly in the 1950s. Textile manufacturing had provided 8,000 jobs in the early months of 1951, and the number decreased over the following decade to about 4,000 to 5,000 in 1961. A major employer, Bates Manufacturing Company remained competitive beyond the 1950s because it kept pace with technological improvements and cultivated a “brand name” market for its specialty products. Nonetheless, by 1962 local shoe shops provided more jobs than the textile mills. Planning Services Group, Part III: “Economic Base Report”, *The Comprehensive Plan, Lewiston, Maine, Program Report* (Cambridge, Mass.: Planning Services Group, 1962), pp. 12–13, 21.

28 Juliette Lajoie (Chenard), *Ste. Famille Federal Credit Union 25th Anniversary, 1938–1963* (n.p.,

Because a large proportion of Sainte-Famille's women did not participate in the labour force but served as homemakers in households where French was the preferred language, and because those who did work gravitated toward the textile and shoe industries where French was commonly spoken, it appears that the women had a key role to play in maintaining the French language and culture of the parish community. Information on the women's religious societies reveals, however, that the parish's women were changing, particularly during the 1960s. In the 1950s *les Dames de Sainte-Anne*, like *l'Association Saint-Joseph*, remained a religious society which continued to promote French-Canadian traditions. The sodality used French at its meetings and maintained its participation in local Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parades, entering such floats as *La prière en famille*, *Vive la Canadienne*, *Un Canadien errant*, and *La Vierge au Foyer*. To make membership attractive, the women's society increasingly incorporated social activities into its programmes, as did the men's society, and their religious and ethnic orientation declined significantly in the 1960s. Late in the decade, unlike *l'Association Saint-Joseph*, *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* switched its language from French to English, marking a significant cultural change.<sup>29</sup>

Lillian Turgeon instituted the changeover to English when she was president of the sodality. As she explained, "French was dropped to attract younger members." In 1967 she began writing part of the monthly newsletter in English, and in the February 1968 bulletin she explained the association's dilemma:

Pourquoi le bulletin en anglais? Si la société des Dames de Ste-Anne veut continuer à fonctionner, il faut attirer les jeunes dames de la paroisse. Une grosse majorité de ces dames ne lisent pas le français. Nous ferons notre possible pour plaire à toutes nos membres mais come vous voyez c'est parfois difficile.

But the changeover to English in oral and written expression did not come about automatically. In February 1968, for instance, when the *Lewiston*

n.d.); *Lewiston Evening Journal*, January 21, 1959, p. 12; *Lewiston Daily Sun*, December 28, 1959, p. 18; Maurice Fontaine, "Message from the President", *Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union 40th Anniversary, 1938-1978*, Maine Family Federal Credit Union, Lewiston, Maine; Caron, *Lewiston Daily Sun*, January 8, 1966, p. 5; Chancery Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Maine, Notes of Reverend Philip Desjardins; Lewiston city directories, 1954-1962; *U.S. Census, 1920*.

<sup>29</sup> Chenard, "Cinquantième anniversaire", pp. 3, 5, 6, and LSA Scrapbook; Julliette Lajoie Chenard, August 14, 1993; Theresa Marcotte, August 14, 1993; Maurice H. Fontaine, who joined *l'Association Saint-Joseph* in the late 1940s and became its president in the early 1950s, July 15, 1993; Wilfrid T. Marcoux, August 25, 1993; interview with Marcel L. Marcotte, who joined *l'Association Saint-Joseph* around 1969 or 1970 and served as its president a decade later, Lewiston, Maine, August 25, 1993; interview with Lillian Turgeon, who joined *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* in the early 1960s and has served in various leadership positions in the society, Lewiston, Maine, August 17, 1993.

*Evening Journal* announced that an individual from the Social Security office would speak to the sodality on Medicare, it also reported that another person (with a French name) would accompany him to offer “explanations and answer questions in the French language if necessary”. Until the autumn of 1969, *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* used both French and English in its bulletins; afterwards, all bulletins appeared in English, except for occasional sentences in French. That year a new secretary also made the transition from French to English in the recording of the organization’s minutes. Subsequent bulletins and minutes do not mention any intergenerational tensions arising from the language changeover in the women’s society.<sup>30</sup>

The activities and eventual demise of *les Enfants de Marie* point out additional ways in which the women of Sainte-Famille parish were changing at mid-century. When Claire Lagace married at Sainte-Famille Church in the mid-1950s, for example, she participated in a ritual identical to the one in which Theresa Marcotte had a decade earlier. During the 1950s Sainte-Famille Church existed in the basement of the present church structure, and the statue of the Blessed Virgin was midway into the building. Lagace, therefore, had to walk up the aisle, then halfway back into the church to reach the statue with the representative of *les Enfants*. Watching this procession, non-Catholic friends with whom Lagace worked in the personnel department of a Lewiston mill wondered if she had suddenly taken ill or had developed cold feet!<sup>31</sup> Lagace’s experience, in addition to highlighting a difference in traditions between Franco and non-Franco women of the period, also gives evidence of the intermixing taking place among Sainte-Famille’s women when they experienced upward occupational mobility.

Perhaps the disappearance of *les Enfants de Marie* is itself another demonstration of how the women of the parish were changing. Only single women could belong to the association, just as only married women could join *les Dames de Sainte-Anne*. *Les Enfants de Marie* disappeared as a distinct society after the mid-1960s, and *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* in 1967 began accepting single women, 25 years of age and older, as associate sodalists.<sup>32</sup> Franco-American women of the parish, this transition suggests, began focusing less on marital status in defining their own identities. Thus, as Sainte-Famille’s women continued their acculturation to and assimilation into U.S. society, they, like women elsewhere in the United States, changed in the twentieth century.

30 Lillian Turgeon, August 17, 1993; Lillian Turgeon in *Bulletin of the Ladies of Saint Ann Sodality*, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, February 1968; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, February 17, 1968, p. 3; *Bulletin of the Ladies of Saint Ann Sodality*, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, 1965–1969; *Minutes d’Assemblée*, Dames de Sainte-Anne, Paroisse Sainte-Famille, Lewiston, Maine, January 20, 1965 – September 1972; Meeting Minutes of the Ladies of Saint Ann, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, September 1973 – December 1980.

31 Claire Lagace, August 18, 1993.

32 Theresa Marcotte, August 14, 1993; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, September 22, 1967, p. 3.

Other parish women, *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph*, continued to promote actively the acculturation of their students during the middle period of Saint-Famille's history. At least through the mid-1960s a number of parish children entered Sainte-Famille School speaking French, and *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* encouraged their parents to speak English at home and to let the children watch television in order to develop a facility in English. The Sisters also provided instruction in the English language in all courses except French.<sup>33</sup> By their efforts, they promoted the cultural transition of the parish community.

The actions of the credit union also reflected the transition taking place at Sainte-Famille in mid-century. Beginning in 1957 the credit union produced its written reports entirely in English. In December 1969 the institution amended its charter, making it possible for anyone living or working within the boundaries of the parish to join. Thereafter, the credit union no longer restricted membership to registered parishioners.<sup>34</sup> This change indicates that the credit union continued not as an ethnic organization but, in welcoming the business of non-Franco-Americans residing within the parish territory, as an assimilative institution.

There was some resistance, however, to the cultural transition taking place in the parish community during this period. At Sainte Famille Credit Union, the dichotomy between written and oral language persisted for some time. When the directors raised the issue of holding the annual meetings of the membership in English around 1949 or 1950, shareholders voiced "strong objections", reported Roger Bissonnette. These meetings, as well as those of the Board of Directors, continued in French through the 1960s. Sainte Famille Credit Union's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 1963 illustrated well this dichotomy between spoken and written language: while Juliette Lajoie (Chenard) wrote the anniversary booklet entirely in English, she delivered her presentation at the banquet in French.<sup>35</sup>

In brief, at the mid-point in its history, Sainte-Famille remained a French

33 Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin, August 6, 1993; Marc Boisvert, cited in Maine's Catholic weekly, *Church World*, June 19, 1975, p. 4; interview with Sr. Yvette Poulin, C.S.J., who taught at Sainte-Famille School from 1945 to 1958 and later served as Superior of the convent until her departure in the early 1970s, Waterville, Maine, August 20, 1993. Through the 1960s a number of parish young people, including the author, learned to speak English while attending Sainte-Famille School.

34 Sainte Famille Federal Credit Union *Annual Report, 1957-1992*, Maine Family Federal Credit Union, Lewiston, Maine; *Ste. Famille Federal Credit Union: 50 Years of Service, 1938-1988* (n.p., n.d.), p. 7; Roger Bissonnette, August 17, 1993. Bissonnette periodically served as a volunteer at the credit union beginning in the early 1940s, worked as a paid assistant from 1955, became treasurer in the early 1960s, and subsequently managed the institution for over a quarter of a century.

35 Roger Bissonnette, August 17, 1993; Maurice H. Fontaine, July 15, 1993; Lajoie, *Ste. Famille Federal Credit Union 25th Anniversary*; M<sup>me</sup> Laurent Lajoie (Juliette Chenard), "Histoire de la fondation de l'Union Cr dit F d rale Sainte Famille   l'occasion de son vint-cinqui me (*sic*) anniversaire, 1938-1963, Paroisse Sainte Famille, Lewiston, Maine" (typescript, Maine Family Federal Credit Union, Lewiston, Maine, 1963).

parish, but its Franco-American communicants clearly were in transition, particularly during the 1960s. While currently available sources do not make it possible to determine the proportion of mid-century communicants who had been born in Canada, it is reasonable to assume that they represented a declining percentage of the parish community; as the ratio of U.S.-born parishioners grew, Sainte-Famille's members increasingly shed aspects of their Franco-American identity. Changes in the local economy threatened their cultural survival, and the activities of Saint-Famille's institutions reflected the acculturation and assimilation taking place among them. The parish societies became less religious and ethnic in orientation as they evolved into social organizations. *Les Dames de Sainte-Anne* switched to English, and the activities and eventual disappearance of *les Enfants de Marie* illustrated that the outlook of Franco-American women of the parish was changing. Instruction offered at Sainte-Famille School by the religious women of the parish continued to promote the acculturation of children, making English their preferred language and making it easier for them to move into the local public schools, as many did in the 1960s, thereby increasing their interaction with children of other ethnic backgrounds.<sup>36</sup> This transition was mirrored by the anglicization of the credit union's written reports in the late 1950s and the opening of membership to non-parishioners.

Other factors contributed as well to the acculturation and assimilation of this Franco-American community. During the middle period of the parish's history, Franco-American communicants of Sainte-Famille less frequently married francophones than they had during the parish's formative decades (see Table 3).<sup>37</sup> By 1964 Sainte-Famille led Lewiston's French churches in

36 Records of *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* and extant parish reports document this transition from parochial to public school enrolment of parish children. *Journal des Soeurs*, 1926–1965: August 27, 1950, p. 59; September 10, 1950, p. 59; September 6, 1951, p. 62; September 9, 1952, p. 66; September 7, 1953, p. 68; September 8, 1954, p. 74; September 8 1955, p. 78; September 6, 1956, p. 81; September 4, 1957, p. 84; September 8, 1958, p. 90; September 4, 1959, p. 93; September 7, 1960, p. 95; September 8, 1961, p. 101; September 3, 1962, p. 110; September 6, 1963, p. 118; September 9, 1964, p. 129; September 8, 1965, p. 142; Archives du provincialat des Soeurs de Saint-Joseph, Winslow, Maine, *Journal de la Sainte-Famille*, Couvent de la Sainte-Famille, Lewiston, Maine, January 1966 – August 1971: September 7, 1966; September 6, 1967; September 4, 1968; September 3, 1969; Chancery Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Maine, *Annual Report*, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, January 1, 1962 – December 31, 1962 and January 1, 1967 – December 31, 1967.

37 Marriage Registers, Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, Volume I: January 1924 – December 23, 1961; Volume II: March 3, 1962 – October 3, 1981; Volume III: October 3, 1981 – present. By way of comparison, endogamy among Sainte-Famille's Franco-American parishioners persisted for a longer time than it had among the Acadians of Old Town, Maine (francophones who had migrated from the Saint John Valley). Marcella Harnish Sorg found that marriages between Acadians in Old Town decreased from 87% in 1900 to 68% in the mid- to late 1920s; at Sainte-Famille, a parallel decrease took place, but from the mid-1920s to the late 1960s (see Table 3). Sorg, "La formation d'une communauté à Old Town, Maine, 1835–1930 : endogamie et origines natales parmi les



**Table 3 Marriage Patterns at Holy Family Parish, 1924–1993**

Decade	Total no. of marriages	Marriages between Franco-Americans (%)	Marriages between a Franco-American and a non-Franco (%)	Marriages between non-Franco-Americans (%)
1924–1929	57	86.0	14.0	0
1930–1939	145	81.4	15.9	2.8
1940–1949	307	81.8	15.0	3.3
1950–1959	344	77.6	21.8	0.6
1960–1969	406	63.1	34.5	2.5
1970–1979	497	54.7	42.1	3.2
1980–1989	415	50.4	43.6	6.0
1990–1993	94	40.4	53.2	6.4

*Source:* Derived from the Marriage Registers of Holy Family parish, 3 vols., 1924–1993. Rows for each decade may not add up to 100.0% due to rounding.

the introduction of English masses. One result of this action was that families of Irish descent joined the parish, further encouraging the intermixing of Franco-Americans with non-Francos. Additionally, technological developments that brought radios, phonographs, and televisions into the homes of parishioners no doubt hastened their acculturation and challenged *survival*.<sup>38</sup> The language and the identity of Sainte-Famille parish were changing, and its cultural survival was at stake.

### Parishioners Today: The 1990s

Census forms compiled by Sainte-Famille (now called Holy Family) parish from 1989 to 1994 provide a portrait of its current communicants.<sup>39</sup> These forms yield such information as the age distribution, family size, and occupations of parishioners, making comparisons possible with the portraits presented earlier. In over 93 per cent of the families, one or both household heads have a French surname or maiden name; although many families are now ethnically mixed, the Franco-American influence at Holy Family is

Acadiens”, translated by Michelle-M. Cotnoir and Claire Quintal, in Claire Quintal, dir., *L’émigrant acadien vers les États-Unis : 1842–1950* (Quebec: Le Conseil de la Vie française en Amérique, 1984), pp. 134, 139–140.

38 Norman Fournier, “Franco-Americans Beginning New Era”, *Portland Sunday Telegram*, January 26, 1964, p. 1C; interview with Reverend Real Nadeau, assistant at Sainte-Famille from 1962 to 1966, Lewiston, Maine, August 23, 1993; Elliott Robert Barkan, “French Canadians”, in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1980), p. 399.

39 Typically completed by communicants, the parish census information forms replaced the census cards, previously maintained and updated by the priests during their home visits with communicants, after the annual parish visits stopped. Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, Parish Census Information, 8 vols., 1989–1994.

unmistakable. In contrast to the earlier periods examined, young families do not make up the bulk of the parish population today, as current parishioners are divided almost evenly at every age group from the thirties through the seventies. While the census forms do not indicate the birthplace of parishioners, the Canadian-born almost certainly make up a very small percentage of Holy Family's 4,760 members.

Family sizes of today's communicants contrast markedly with those of parishioners at Holy Family's founding. While nuclear families of procreation ranged from one to eleven members in 1920, they currently range from one to seven individuals.<sup>40</sup> The aging of the parish does not alone explain this difference. These figures demonstrate that family practices and preferences as well as religious values have changed over the course of the century. For example, despite the Catholic Church's continued opposition to birth control, parishioners evidently have made conscious decisions to limit the size of their families. Another marker of changed religious values, while not surprising, is that a number of registrants are divorced. By way of contrast, none of the original communicants located in the 1920 census was divorced.<sup>41</sup>

Self-reported occupational data reflect the upward mobility of parishioners. Although a majority of Holy Family's working men continue to hold blue-collar jobs, they have gained more access to salaried, professional positions as well as to small business and managerial occupations (see Table 1). Parish women today are nearly as likely to participate in the labour force as the men, and they are now represented in a much wider range of occupations than in the past, reflecting a measure of upward mobility. Most striking is that the statistics reveal a greater than 50 per cent drop since the 1950s and 1960s in the proportion of working women engaged in industrial, blue-collar jobs.<sup>42</sup> The decline of the local textile mills and shoe shops, which were the largest employers of Holy Family's women through the parish's middle years (see Table 2), accounts in large part for this change. If greater participation in the labour force and upward occupational mobility have led to the acculturation and assimilation of Holy Family's female members, they have also affected Franco-American cultural survival in the parish.

The vertical occupational mobility of communicants has corresponded with the parish's outward expressions of anglicization. Since 1964 Holy Family, perhaps Lewiston's most assimilated parish, has offered more English masses than have the city's three other Franco-American churches. Unlike them, Holy Family today celebrates no masses in French, despite the expressed desire of many parishioners to retain at least one French mass.<sup>43</sup>

40 *U.S. Census, 1920*; Holy Family parish census, 1989–1994.

41 Holy Family parish census, 1989–1994; *U.S. Census, 1920*.

42 Lewiston city directories, 1954–1962; Holy Family parish census, 1989–1994.

43 Fournier, "Franco-Americans Beginning New Era"; *Lewiston Evening Journal Magazine Section*, December 16, 1967, p. 7–A; October 11, 1969, p. 6–A; June 11, 1983, p. 7–A; *Lewiston Sun-*

In an effort to survive, both *les Dames de Sainte-Anne* (now the Ladies of Saint Ann) and *l'Association Saint-Joseph* (Saint Joseph Association) changed their language from French to English to attract and retain younger members. Despite doing so in the late 1960s and evolving into a social organization that is much less ethnic in nature, the women's society currently is bringing in few new members and is in decline as a parish institution. Similarly, although the Saint Joseph Association had changed its language by the early 1980s and focused on fundraising rather than religious goals, it attracted little interest from the membership in its final years and disbanded in 1992.<sup>44</sup> These religious societies represented the last bastions of French-Canadian Catholicism at Holy Family. Their degeneration symbolizes the declining religiosity and ethnicity of the parish community.

Symbolic of the same changes was the closing of Holy Family School in 1973. Most students entered the public school system rather than transfer to another parochial school in the city. Parish children partaking of public education intermixed with youth of various ethnic backgrounds, thereby continuing the acculturation and assimilation process the Sisters of Saint Joseph had encouraged in their nearly 50 years of teaching at Holy Family School.

Sweeping changes within the Catholic Church, initiated by the Second Vatican Council, indirectly contributed to the school's closing. One of the directives that emerged from Vatican II instructed religious communities to re-examine the vision and inspiration of their founders and follow them in the modern era. Consequently, by 1971 the Maine Province of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph adopted the Principle of Choice Minis-

*Journal*, January 22, 1994, p. 10. In response to a questionnaire distributed in the pews in 1988, 67% of the respondents voted to continue the sole French mass that the parish celebrated at 8:00 on Sunday mornings. Because attendance was small at the early morning French mass, Holy Family had dropped it by June 1991 (and perhaps earlier), becoming the first and only Franco-American church in Lewiston to celebrate all masses in English. Displeased by this ultimate language changeover, some of Holy Family's parishioners now attend masses at other churches in Lewiston. Interview with Cecile Coulombe, longtime parishioner, Lewiston, Maine, August 7, 1993; questionnaire of September 1988, inserted into the Holy Family Parish Council Meeting Minutes, January 1987 – December 1988; Wilfrid T. Marcoux, August 25, 1993; interview with parishioner Claudette Jalbert, Lewiston, Maine, July 29, 1993; Lucia Jutras, August 7, 1993; *Lewiston Daily Sun*, June 22 and 29, 1991, p. 6; *Lewiston Sun-Journal*, June 22 and 29, 1991, p. 6; Jacqueline LeTendre, August 25, 1993.

44 Interviews with Lillian Turgeon, Lewiston, Maine, August 17 and 21, 1993; Claire Lagace, August 18, 1993; Marcel L. Marcotte, August 25, 1993; Wilfrid T. Marcoux, August 25, 1993; Holy Family Parish, Lewiston, Maine, *Minutes of the Saint Joseph Association*, November 18, 1979 – May 17, 1992; Rev. Roger J. Ouellette, August 24, 1993. Although English is now the language of the Ladies of Saint Ann, the society's bylaws and prayers appear in both French and English in its current booklet. This is undoubtedly for the benefit of senior members; in 1994, 245 of the association's 407 members were 70 years of age or older, and only 23 were younger than 50. See *Règlements des Dames de Sainte Anne/St. Ann's Sodality By-laws, Holy Family Church, Lewiston, Maine* (Lewiston, Maine: St. Ann's Sodality, n.d.); the figures given above are from Lillian Turgeon, shared with the author in March 1994.

tries: through the “discernment” process, Sisters in dialogue with others in their congregation and the Portland diocese could, for the first time, choose to serve in ministries where they felt their talents would be best utilized. Following a French custom, the Sisters in the past had received a pink slip with their annual assignment, termed an “obedience”. The magnitude of the change permitting the Sisters a choice of assignments is best revealed by contrasting it with descriptions of the former system from the journal of the convent at Holy Family:

*11 juin 1965*

Après le Veni Sancte du soir, notre Mère a distribué à chaque Soeur une enveloppe dans laquelle il y avait une lettre de Mère Provinciale si nous étions changée ou une note de Notre Mère si nous restions ici l’année prochaine. Notre sacrifice ou notre joie est restée caché entre le bon Dieu, nos Mères et chacune de nous dans notre petite chambre.

*12 juin 1965*

Notre Mère a révélé tous les secrets des changements des Soeurs avant le déjeuner. Toutes les oreilles étaient tendues et quelles surprises nous avons eu en apprenant que notre Mère et dix de nos Soeurs partiraient!

*9 juin 1967*

Mère Anne-Marie, notre Provinciale, nous a envoyé nos obédiences pour l’année 1967–1968. Nos peines de famille commencent.<sup>45</sup>

As a result of the discernment process, the Sisters of Saint Joseph expanded their ministry. In addition to teaching, they involved themselves in health care, social services, pastoral counselling, day-care services, youth ministry, criminal justice, and prison ministry, as well as foreign missions in Mexico, Brazil, India, Lebanon, and Greece. Due to the reduction in the number of teaching Sisters, Holy Family School dropped grades one through three in 1971, and the Lewiston public school system took over these grades, sharing the school building in a cooperative arrangement with the parish. By 1973 only two religious sisters chose through the discernment process to continue teaching at Holy Family School. Financially overextended after building a new rectory in the late 1960s, and unable to hire lay faculty or to find enough nuns from other orders to replace the departing Sisters of Saint Joseph, Holy Family had to close its school.<sup>46</sup>

45 Rev. William K. McDonough, “Mini-Congress Reveals New Directions for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Maine”, *Church World*, July 9, 1971, p. 5; Sr. Janet Gagnon, C.S.J., “Sisters of St. Joseph Re-examine their Founder’s Vision”, *Church World*, April 24, 1980, p. 13; Sr. Marie Therese Beaudoin, August 6, 1993; *Journal des Soeurs*, 1926–1965 and 1966–1971.

46 Sr. Janet Gagnon, C.S.J., “Sisters of St. Joseph: From a Little Log Cabin in Missouri, C.S.J. Family

At present, the only institution thriving at Holy Family parish is the credit union. As Sainte Famille Credit Union has sought to attract new members in recent decades, it has presented itself as something other than a parish institution and has worked to shed its Franco-American identity. In the early 1970s the board of directors changed the language of its meetings from French to English to accommodate several new directors elected by the membership who could understand but not speak French. Subsequently, when the credit union's president asked the members at an annual meeting if they would object to conducting their meetings in English, one shareholder responded emphatically: "On est tous des Canadiens; on restera français," to which the audience applauded. Nonetheless, because the president and other directors found it difficult to continue translating reports from English to French for these annual meetings, they introduced English gradually, with one report delivered in English one year, two the next, and so on until the mid-1970s, when the meetings were held almost entirely in English. In recent decades the credit union has not only extended membership to non-parishioners, but also altered its territorial boundaries so that they no longer coincide with those of the parish. Most symbolic of Sainte Famille Credit Union's modified identity is that in 1993 it dropped its parish and French name to become the Maine Family Federal Credit Union.<sup>47</sup>

Declining ethnicity and continuing assimilation, in a context of inter-generational tension, characterize the period of Holy Family's history from

Tree Spreads through U.S.", *Church World*, April 17, 1980, p. 10, and "Sisters of St. Joseph Return to Founder's Insight, Vision", *Church World*, May 1, 1980, p. 14; *Church World*, March 26, 1981, p. 23; October 8, 1981, p. 16; May 31, 1984, p. 18; Paul Paré, "Ask Lewiston School System [to] Staff Classes Dropped by Holy Family", *Lewiston Evening Journal*, March 4, 1971, p. 1; *Lewiston Daily Sun*, September 9, 1971, p. 32; Chancery Archives, Holy Family School File, memorandum of Monsignor Charles M. Murphy, Director of Education, to (Auxiliary) Bishop Edward C. O'Leary, December 12, 1972; Chancery Archives, Holy Family School File, Rev. Donald R. Proulx, Administrator, Sr. Roselle Dionne, Principal, Marcel Marcotte, Parish Council President, and Lionel Berube, School Board President, to Monsignor Charles Murphy, February 21, 1973; Chancery Archives, Holy Family School File, memorandum of Monsignor Charles M. Murphy to Sr. Theresa Morin, S.C.I.M., December 29, 1972. The closing of Holy Family School was, of course, part of a larger trend affecting parochial education. Nearly half of Maine's Catholic elementary and high schools closed from 1966 to 1971, when their numbers decreased from 79 to 41. In Lewiston, Sainte-Marie parish closed its school in 1968, and Saint Patrick's did the same in 1973. Only the schools of Sainte-Croix, Saint Joseph, and Sainte-Pierre parishes survived. Donald C. Hansen, "Maine Catholic Schools Await Supreme Court Decision", *Maine Sunday Telegram*, March 21, 1971, p. 4A; *Lewiston Daily Sun*, January 17, 1968, p. 4; Cecile Levasseur, comp., *75th Anniversary of the Founding of St. Mary's Parish, Lewiston, Maine, 1907-1982* (n.p., 1982), p. 23; Paul Paré, "Holy Family School to Close this June", *Lewiston Evening Journal*, February 13, 1973, p. 1.

47 Maurice H. Fontaine, July 15 and 29, 1993; Roger Bissonnette, August 17, 1993; *Ste. Famille Federal Credit Union: 50 Years of Service*, pp. 7-8; Joe O'Connor, "Maine's Credit Unions Outpacing Competition in Growth", *Lewiston Daily Sun*, February 11, 1985, p. 9; Teresa Dudek, "Ste. Famille: After 50 Years, Maine's First Parish Credit Union as Solid as Ever", *Lewiston Sunday*, April 17, 1988, p. 1G; Ronald L. Bissonnette, "A New Name", *Maine Family Federal Credit Union Quarterly*, vol. 1 (Winter 1993), p. 1.

the 1970s to the present. The diminishing proportion of Canadian-born parishioners was but one element in Holy Family's changing identity. Upward occupational mobility, public education, changed religious values evidenced in part by decreasing family size and an increased rate of divorce, and the anglicization of the parish, as demonstrated by changes in its institutions and the changeover to English masses, all served to narrow the differences between communicants and non-Franco-Americans. Marriage patterns also reflect the assimilation of parishioners. In the 1970s and 1980s, Franco-American communicants selected Franco spouses only about 50 per cent of the time, and in the early 1990s around 40 per cent of the time (see Table 3). These figures represent significant drops from earlier periods as parishioners have increasingly intermixed with non-Franco-Americans, a number of them non-Catholic as a result of the greater openness of the Catholic Church following the meetings of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

This study of the people and institutions of Sainte-Famille parish of Lewiston, Maine, illustrates the experiences of Franco-Americans after the well-studied migration, settlement, and community-formation period of their history in the United States. For Sainte-Famille, sources available in its important parish institutions, in various religious archives, and in the local community reveal that the cultural identity of communicants remained intact from the 1920s to the 1940s as Sainte-Famille helped parishioners pursue both ethnicity and acculturation. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sainte-Famille's mid-history period, the cultural survival of the parish was at stake, as changes in the local economy, the advent of new technologies, and, above all, the promotion of English language use by *les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* made their impact upon the parish population, particularly upon its youth. At mid-century, especially during the 1960s, ethnicity and assimilation became dichotomous goals, due largely to intergenerational tensions within the parish. Sainte-Famille increasingly facilitated assimilation, however. From the 1970s to the present the parish abandoned most vestiges of its Franco-American identity, most notably the use of French, as it pursued the goal of assimilation — at a pace apparently faster than Lewiston's other Franco-American parishes and, at times, more rapidly than communicants desired. Evidently, the process was occasionally painful for parishioners. Today, Holy Family is predominantly an anglophone community, and its remaining institutions, no longer cultural hearth-keepers, do little if anything to promote Franco-American ethnicity.

The pursuit of Franco-American identity is thus a personal matter at Sainte-Famille, as it is elsewhere among persons of French-Canadian descent in the United States. Individual communicants maintain their ethnic identity

48 Holy Family Marriage Registers, 1924–present.

in a variety of ways. Some, notably senior parishioners, continue to speak French. Others have chosen not to anglicize the pronunciation of their names and continue to refer to their credit union as Sainte Famille Credit Union. Some still attend midnight mass at Christmas and have a *réveillon* following the mass. Many parishioners continue the tradition of serving such ethnic foods as *creton* (sandwich spread made of pork), pea soup, and *tortière* (pork pie), the latter especially at Christmas.<sup>49</sup> Some communicants undoubtedly attend the *Festival de Joie*, Lewiston's annual celebration of Franco-American heritage. Because Holy Family parish currently plays little, if any, role in the transmission of Franco-American culture, the task now remains the choice and strategy of individual communicants.

Historian Mason Wade once noted: "The parish has remained the bulwark of the Franco-American's remarkable resistance to assimilation in the general population, which surpasses that of any other American immigrant group."<sup>50</sup> Rather than serving to resist assimilation, however, Sainte-Famille parish from its inception actively functioned as an assimilationist parish. During its first several decades it pursued both ethnicity and acculturation, and from mid-century it increasingly pursued only assimilation. Consequently, the identity of the parish community evolved from Franco-American to American. What happened at Sainte-Famille over the course of the twentieth century probably happened at other Franco-American parishes throughout the northeastern United States. The emergence of comparable studies likely will reveal that many other Franco-American parish communities promoted assimilation, perhaps at a different pace, but in much the same way as Sainte-Famille.

49 Weil, *Les Franco-Américains*, p. 218; Lucia Jutras and Cecile Coulombe, August 7, 1993; Juliette Lajoie Chenard, August 7 and 14, 1993; interview with original parishioner, Armosa Dumont, Lewiston, Maine, August 17, 1993; Jacqueline LeTendre, August 25, 1993; Claire Lagace, August 18, 1993; Claudette Jalbert, July 29, 1993.

50 Mason Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 147.