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Assimilation of French-Canadian Names into New England Speech: Notes from a Vermont Cemetery

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Headstones in St Mary's Cemetery in Middlebury, Vermont, and entries in the marriage repertoire of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the same town illustrate patterns of Canadian French accommodation to New England phonology as French-speaking immigrants established themselves there, as well as French-Canadian adaptation to New England identity and the social motivations for allowing given and family names to mark cultural assimilation and, alternatively, resisting change of name as such a marker.

The headstones in St Mary's Cemetery, the Roman Catholic cemetery in Middlebury, Vermont, preserve some 450 surnames gathered in that small New England town from all over the world. Many are English, Scots, or Irish in origin, such as *Adams*, *Baxter*, *Cobb*, *Dougherty*, *Fitzpatrick*, *Gordon*, *Hodges*, *Kelly*, *McGuire*, *Pickering*, *Rochford*, *Shortsleeves*, *Tully*, and *Webb*. The presence of Italian names in a north-eastern Roman Catholic cemetery is hardly a surprise, so *Carbonetti*, *Cassarino*, and *Ciufo*. Some are more exotic, even given the melting pot's tendency to blend difference into complex American flavor with an occasional ethnic kick; thus, Slavic surnames like *Goka* and *Hrska* occur minimally but measurably in the record of immigration and settlement. Janos Toth (1937–1957) lies under a stone marked 'Hungarian Freedom Fighter Budapest Oct. 1956.' Thereby hangs a tale, I am sure, though not that of the present study.

At least 110 of the names are Canadian French in origin. As many as 170 may be Canadian French originally, but some Anglicized forms of French names are historically so common that they camouflage French origins and, without precise genealogical information in a particular case, are chronologically indeterminate evidence of interlinguistic reanalysis and cultural assimilation. Thus, in St Mary's Cemetery, French Canadians and their descendants account for somewhere between 25% and 38% of all names represented on headstones. Many of the names belong to families whose members were buried in the cemetery over generations, and over

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those generations, names often changed from French-Canadian to English forms: some of the change is graphological, some phonological, some a mixture of the two. As transparent as some of the forms seem, several raise questions about patterns of French-Canadian adaptation to New England identity, and about social motivations for allowing names to mark cultural assimilation and, alternatively, resisting change of name as such a marker.

The St Mary's headstone evidence suggests that adaptation to English from Canadian French occurred almost as soon as French Canadians arrived in Middlebury. **François Guy* was the name of the first born among those buried in the cemetery (1792–1874), and he was buried under the name *Francisse Gee*. The Anglicized *Gee* cut into his headstone may have been recorded at the border and willingly adopted by the bearer, who was, according to the inscription on his headstone, 'Born in St. Ann District of Quebec. Became a resident of Middlebury, in 1840.' Or, *Gee* may have been the work of a stonecutter unused to rounding his vowels.[1] A Francis Gee apparently had married a Jennie Loizelle clandestinely (perhaps *à la gaumine*); their marriage was rehabilitated, that is, brought into line with Roman Catholic doctrine, in the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Middlebury, on 26 May 1856.[2] A Francis Gee is also listed as parent with Priscilla Dion in register entries for both the marriage of Louis Bonus Gee to Mary Bourdon, on 30 June 1857, and the rehabilitation of the marriage between Louisa Gee and Joseph St George, on 26 May 1856. Given the coincidence of dates for the two rehabilitations, it seems unlikely that the two Francis Gees are one and the same. Importantly, though, all members of the clan represented in these and subsequent marriages, as well as others of the same name, are written into the register with the *dit* name *Gee* — *Guy* does not appear in the parish marriage register.[3]

But the given name on the stone, *Francisse*, is revealing of something, maybe more than one thing. Clearly, Mr Gee had adopted *Francis* in favor of *François*; just as clearly, he pronounced the English variant with French stress and the French high front tense vowel /i/. The stonecutter took *Gee* at face value, without interpretation, suggesting that the family used this spelling, for he knew enough about French spelling to accurately represent the sound of Mr Gee's incompletely Anglicized given name. This rendering of *François/Francis* seems to have been current in nineteenth-century Middlebury among recently emigrated French Canadians: *Tousant Vassau* was difficult to Anglicize, though *Tousant* probably represents some modification of *Toussaint* — spelling alone does not allow us to determine the vowels with certainty. Tousant Vassau's brother, however, was called *Francies*.

The relationship of French to English prosody explains *Francisse* and *Francies*, but is also at the heart of many problematic sets of family names in St Mary's. Personal and family names of Romance origin, when reanalyzed as English, tend to shift stress from later syllables in the name, where it is often located in Romance names, to the first syllable, following a typical Germanic pattern.[4] For instance, Early Middle English borrowed the Old French word *burnet/brunet* to mean 'any of several plants with brown flowers' and thus 'dark brown' and 'type of brown cloth.' Metathetic alternation is already present in Old French; in both Old French and Middle English, *burnet/burnette* tends to indicate the plant, under the influence of Middle Latin *burneta* (see *MED* s.v. *burnet*); *brunette*, in the French sense that Randle Cotgrave (1611)

glossed as 'nut-browne girle' was not borrowed into English until late in the Early Modern period (see *OED* s.v. *brunette*, *n*. and *a*.); eventually, *burnet*/*burnette* became a family name, *Burnett*.

When *burnet*/*burnette* entered Middle English, it was pronounced with stress on the second syllable; but the Modern English *Burnett* in novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett's name is stressed on the first syllable (see Powell, 1982: 28). So is *Marvell* in the name of the Early Modern poet Andrew Marvell, probably derived from the French placename *Merville* (see Hanks and Hodges, 1988: 350, s.v. *Marvel* in sense 2). The tendency towards second syllable stress in such names is a form of hypercorrection, prompted by the assumption that French sounds more sophisticated than English, much the same assumption that leads the class-conscious television anti-heroine Hyacinth Bucket, from the BBC's situation comedy, *Keeping Up Appearances*, to pronounce her name as *Bouquet* rather than *Bucket*.

The progress from French-Canadian family name to Anglicized form of an originally French-Canadian family name follows this well worn road, but it stops unexpectedly and takes some detours along the way. A case in point begins at French Canadian *Ouimette*, which leads to Modern American English *Wemitt*, *Wimett*, and *Wimmette*. The precise chronology of these forms is unclear on the evidence of St Mary's headstones alone: *Ouimette* is a twenty-first-century spelling, either because some branch of the original family retained the original spelling (an issue to which we will return in a moment) or because the name was reintroduced.[5] One suspects that *Wimmette* follows *Ouimette* most closely, followed then by *Wimett* and *Wemitt*.

Full Anglicization of *Ouimette* would require a few steps, and all but one appear to have been accomplished over time (or differentially, that is, in different ways for different subgroups of the Ouimette clan): first, the onset of the initial syllable would unround; second, the first syllable's French high front vowel would lower and back a bit; third, the stress should shift onto the first syllable, as it had in post-Norman England, and would intuitively in American English, too. But *Wemitt* suggests that this final stage of adaptation was not assured, for, in that case, either the vowels have mysteriously transposed, or the vowel in the initial syllable reflects the schwaing of the French unstressed vowel and the raising of the vowel in the second syllable.

The pattern extends across a variety of French Canadian names recorded in the cemetery, almost exactly in the case of *Ouillette*, which yields *Ouellette*, as well as *Willett*.[6] So also *Bissette* and *Bessette*, and quite possibly *Bressett*, *Brickett*, and (one hopes) *Goulette*. *Brouillet* persists with a simplified vowel, articulated liquid, and articulated final stop, much (but not quite) as *Drolette* reflects the schwaing and stopping of *Drouillet*. But it also persists, according to the current Burlington/Middlebury, Vermont, area telephone directory, as modified French *Bruyea* and the English/French hybrid form *Bruley*. It is, of course, possible that the near contemporaries *Margaret Dukett* and *Marie Duquette* were biologically and culturally unrelated, respectively Anglophone and Francophone — it is, indeed, prosodically preferable that they were. But one wonders whether they were constantly correcting nineteenth-century tradesmen, much as Hyacinth Bucket would in our own time. *Dumas*, *Gagnon*, and *Shambo* (from *Chambeau*) may have retained their French stress character, but the first two, at least, have taken Germanic stress for some Americans

bearing them. Thomas Choquette's descendants probably found it difficult to preserve his good French name from utter Anglicization as *Shackett*, though second syllable stress, however unlikely, is certainly possible. And although *Trudeau* enters Middlebury early on, within a generation or two it shows up on headstones as *Tredeau*, which seems to retain the pattern of stress, but also as *Troudo* and *Trudo*, which are ambiguous but incline towards representing English stress.

Some of the Anglicization is doubtless given, but much of it, considering affiliations recorded in the cemetery, occurred after families settled in or near Middlebury. Though spellings from the headstones raise questions and possibilities, they rarely can assure that pronunciation of names varied within the community or changed over time. There were lots of answers, in some cases, to the question, 'How do I best represent the French sounds of this name?' Some who asked the question may have intended to English the name — 'How do I best represent the French sounds of this name in English sounds?' — but others may have struggled, may not have been particularly good at spelling, or may not have cared, as social prejudice against French-Canadian Catholic immigrants might first have been registered with transcription of their names.

But otherwise variants of names like *Ouimette*, *Ouillette*, *Trudeau*, and *Marseilles* (which appears as *Marcel*, *Marcelles*, *Marcilles*, and *Marseals*) could reflect a couple of different things. First, they could indicate straightforward development of the names from French to English over time, whether the names were held by a single family or more than one family. This possibility is made problematic because forms co-occur, and we cannot rule out reintroduction of a name, represented as a *dit* name either already present in Middlebury or newly established there. Nevertheless, in some cases, some of the *dit* names belong to the same family — relations among headstones and their proximity make this clear.

Second, differentiation of *dit* names among families may indicate that some French-Canadian Vermont families deliberately retained the French character of their names, while others (like 'Francisse' Gee) just as deliberately put them aside, and still others, uncommitted to ethnicity or an onomastic philosophy, just let things happen. In other words, variation among *dit* names may not be just a question of layers of onomastic form — it may be socially motivated. Status within the community (the French-Canadian community, the Middlebury community) might affect decisions to change or retain French-Canadian names; so also might a desire, within such a small community, either to fit in or stand out by interpreting name heritage in one or the other direction.

Such differences of interpretation arise not only among families bearing the same notional family name, but also within families. For instance, two brothers spell their family name P-o-w-e-l-l: one of them, Sir Charles Powell, was Private Secretary to British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and pronounces *Powell* (from the Welsh patronymic *ap Howell*) as a homophone of *pole*, to rhyme with *Old King Cole*; the second, Jonathon Powell, serves as Prime Minister Tony Blair's Chief of Staff and rhymes *Powell* with *fowl* and *American Idol* judge *Simon Cowell*. Perhaps it is merely convenience, a wish to avoid confusion, that motivated different pronunciations of the name within the same generation of the same family. Or perhaps it was party politics, one of the brothers a committed Tory, the other a

Labour Party operative (see Chancellor [1993] and Cohen [n.d.]). Richard Bucket, a man with no pretensions and happy with his name, pronounces it to rhyme with the synonym for *pail*; Hyacinth Bucket, a woman of aggressive pretensions, reforms the name to sound like a bouquet of flowers, perhaps a bouquet of hyacinths. In spite of their onomastic differences, though, husband and wife sleep in the same bed.

It is interesting, then to note the patterns of onomastic variation and change within families in St Mary's marriage 'repertoire,' or register. Louis Bonus Gee and Mary Bourdon, the register tells us, were married on 30 June 1857. They were members of the first native generation of French-Canadians in Middlebury. Louis Bonus 'Boni' Gee's father, Francis, was the earliest of French-Canadian settlers to the area, naturalized but not native. Again, the register records the almost immediate modification of French names to their obvious English alternatives. All of the family names in the entry are French-Canadian, and, with the exception of Anglicized *Gee*, maintain their French forms: *Bourdon*, *Dion*, and *Rochelot*. The given names entered, on the other hand, through pronunciation cannot be determined from spelling alone: we have already considered this particular *Francis*; *Priscilla*, given as the first name of Priscilla Dion, Francis Gee's wife, is Anglicized; it is impossible to tell whether *Simon* in *Simon Bourdon* and *Margaret* in *Margaret Rochelot*, the names of Mary Bourdon's parents, are French-Canadian or American English in orientation.

Ten years after their marriage, in 1867, Louis Bonus Gee and Mary Bourdon had a daughter, Josephine, who was married as Josephine A. Gee to John Dyer on 15 July 1903. In the entry for that marriage, Josephine's parents are listed as *Boni Gee* and *Marie Bourdon*, names that maintain a French-Canadian heritage and identity into the third generation after settlement, identity that may have been obscured in the earlier entry, but which operated throughout the interim nonetheless. Somewhat later, *Bonus Gee* and *Mary Bourdon* reappear in the entry for the marriage of Mary F. Gee to Bruno Albert on 23 July 1916. Bonus Gee and Mary Bourdon had somewhat unstable onomastic identities, then. It is worth noting that a French-Canadian character obtrudes in the record of a marriage between their daughter and an unambiguously English or Anglo-Irish family (John Dyer's parents were Gardner Dyer and Mary Mosley), but recedes again when the union is comfortably French Canadian, or, as suggested below, when French identity for settled and assimilated families is difficult to maintain.

Marriages involving the Middlebury Beauregard clan illustrate something like the same vexed pattern, though French-Canadian identity seems even more strongly maintained, given the onomastic evidence. Joseph Beauregard and Philomene St Michel appear to be roughly contemporary with Francis Gee and Priscilla Dion; their own marriage is not recorded in the register, so we may safely infer that they were French-Canadian settlers. They appear first in the marriage of their son, Joseph Beauregard, and a young woman represented as *Ellen Fortier* in the register on 29 March 1869; her parents were Marcel Fortier and Frances Gagnier, names French Canadian enough but, in the mother's case, possibly touched up by American English.

The elder Joseph Beauregard and Philomene St Michel had several children, besides the younger Joseph, whose marriages are entered in the St Mary's register:

- Josephine Beauregard married Theophile Hebert on 14 October 1870
- Octavie Beauregard married Ludger Panton on 26 September 1870
- Francis Beauregard married Caroline Perreault (daughter of Charles Perreault and Cordalie Ainse) on 11 February 1872
- Philogone Beauregard married Mary Duchene on 8 January 1875
- Mary Beauregard married Alexandre Hatin (Highter) in 1879
- Philomene Beauregard married Augustin Gagnier on 30 March 1891.

One notices immediately the persistently French-Canadian character of the Beauregard given names (*Octavie*, *Philogone*, and *Philomene*), the family names of their spouses (*Perreault* and *Gagnier*, for instance), those same spouses' given names (especially *Theophile*, *Alexandre*, and *Augustin*), and their parents' names (such as *Cordalie*). The more families of French-Canadian heritage marry into other families of French-Canadian heritage, it stands to reason, then the more French-Canadian in character their names, family and given, tend to be.

Nevertheless, throughout the list of Beauregard marriages, one finds evidence of mild accommodation to American English speech. By 1879, *Hatin* was apparently archaic in the community and was being replaced by the *dit* name *Highter*. The *dit* name *Duchene* replaces *Duchesne*, but the latter is French in spelling only, for the *s* is silent in French; *Duchene*, then, is merely an English phonetic spelling, but English nonetheless. The given names *Josephine*, *Francis*, *Caroline*, *Charles*, and *Mary* may be fully or partially Anglicized (as in *Francisse*) or may reflect variation in personal use, *Mary* one year, in one social circumstance, and *Marie* the next, as circumstance or the bearer's whim direct. Because the register does not note *accents acutes* (as in *Théophile*) or *accents graves* (as in *Philomène*), one cannot tell whether the affected vowels are produced as in Canadian French or in American English; similarly, one cannot tell whether the word-initial *Th* in *Theophile* is a strongly aspirated /t/ or an Americanized /θ/.

Thus the second, or first native, generation of Middlebury Beauregards. Marriage records for the third, or second native, generation demonstrate the irresistible influence of American English on French-Canadian names. Joseph Beauregard the younger and Ellen Fortier had half a dozen children:

- Clarice Beauregard, who married Frank Beauparlant (son of Joseph Beauparlant and Lena Belanger) on 18 June 1894
- Lillie Beauregard, who married Cleophas Partenant (son of Charles Partenant and Margaret Coutu) on 9 October 1894
- Henrietta Beuaregard, who married Edward F. Smith (son of Harvey Smith and 'An.' McBride) on 7 July 1897
- Joseph Augustin, who married Ida Mombleau (daughter of Augustin Mombleau and Elmira Beauregard) on 7 February 1898
- Octavia Beauregard, who married Albert Bonparlant (son of Jospeh Bonparlant and Louise (Nellie) Perrau) on 29 April 1901.

Granted, family names like *Partenant*, *Coutu*, *Beauparlant*, and *Bonparlant* are as French Canadian as any appearing in the previous generation, as are given names like *Cleophas* (minus the acute accent), *Augustin*, and *Clarice*. Some names in the list are ambiguously French-Canadian or English, such as *Lillie*, *Charles*, *Margaret*, *Joseph*,

Lena, *Albert*, and *Louise*. *Henrietta*, *Ida*, *Elmira*, and *Frank*, however, are not so ambiguous, but are clearly American-English names. Surnames like *Mombleau* and *Belanger* are easily Anglicized: indeed, *Belanger* is usually pronounced in the United States with stress on the initial syllable; and *Mombleau* often resolves into *dit* names like *Mumblo*, similarly stressed. It is impossible to determine from the marriage register to what extent the sounds of these names had migrated in the direction of American English.

Four details of the Beauregards' third generation marriage entries are particularly interesting. First, Ellen Fortier (misnamed *Emilia Fortier* in the entry for Henrietta's wedding in 1897) is represented as *Helen Fortier* in the entries for Clarice's wedding (1895) and Octavia's wedding (1901). This change from *Ellen* to *Helen* is doubly significant: it suggests that the elder Joseph Beauregard's spouse was not, in fact, named English *Ellen* but Canadian French *Hélène*, Anglicized, perhaps in speech (along the lines of *Francisse*) but certainly in writing by an English-speaking priest; it further suggests that *Hélène* was, at least on occasion later in her life, fully Anglicized to *Helen*. In other words, Hélène Fortier's name went through three stages corresponding to the three generations of originally French-Canadian families among whom she lived: she was *Hélène* according to her French-speaking parents at baptism; she was *Ellen* to those of her own generation, who modified their French names in speech fully or partially to accommodate New England vowels and according to English stress rules; and she was *Helen* by the time she had grandchildren, fully Anglicized on the basis of her written rather than spoken name.

Second, the younger Joseph Beauregard's sister was named *Octavie*; her niece, daughter of Joseph and Helen, according to the entry for her marriage in 1901, was named *Octavia*. Of course, *Octavia* is not an English name of any frequency and clearly represents Anglicized departure from its model in the aunt's name. Third, while *Hatin* had apparently been altered to the *dit* name *Highter* as early as Mary Beauregard's marriage to Alexandre Hatin in 1879, the entry for Octavia's marriage indicates that her traditional family name, *Beauregard*, was replaced by 1901 with the common *dit* name *Burgor*. Similarly, her husband's family name, *Bonparlant*, is linked to the alias, *Tucker*. Neither *Bonparlant* nor *Beauparlant*, especially the former, willingly takes stress on the first syllable; though either might take stress on the second, that is, on the first syllable of one element in the compound, the results sound odd in English. Thus, either word might render the calque, **Talker*, neither much attested as a family name in English, nor a name that one would likely choose. *Tucker* was, given these conditions, a good alternative.

Finally, as with the Gees, the Beauregards married into a couple of 100% English or Anglo-Irish families, the Smiths and the McBrides, English in heritage with English in names, and the connection may have encouraged a slightly quicker pace of gradual assimilation. In any event, the assimilation — in sounds, forms, and in the adoption of radical *dit* names or aliases, such as *Bougor* and *Tucker* — is more or less accomplished by the fourth generation of these well established Middlebury families, in spite of French-Canadian intermarriage and maintenance of French-Canadian heritage and names, the eventual resolution of that middle period during which English and French names for families and even for individuals frequently co-occur.

The St Mary's marriage register contains many series of entries like that for those describing unions within the Beauregard clan. For example, entries for marriages of Middlebury residents with the family name *Choquette* emphatically confirm patterns of onomastic assimilation evident in, among others, records of the Beauregards and Gees. In the case of the Choquettes, however, relationships among those listed in the entries is unclear; there is no reason on the evidence of the register to assume that, with four exceptions, any Choquette is related to any of the others:

- Dominic Choquette, son of Eusebe Choquette and Margaret Bush, married Alice Dion (Jones), daughter of Joseph Dion and Adele Bourdeau, on 28 October 1876
- Jennie Choquette, daughter of Israel and [Sarah Vincent Choquette?], married William Becette, son of Peter Becette and Victorine Vincelette, on 16 February 1885
- Paul Choquette (Shackett) married Emilie Lebrun on 22 February 1887
- Harriet Choquette, daughter of Israel Choquette and Sarah Vincent, married George E. Adam, son of Joseph Adam and Mary Labonte, on 3 February 1891
- Irene Choquette (Shackett), daughter of Damase Choquette and Jane Chartier, married Andrew Palsa, son of George Palsa and Mary Hudack, on 6 September 1897
- Rexford E. Choquette (Shackett), son of Damien Choquette and Alice Dion (Young), married Lewella G. Carl, daughter of William Carl and Louisa Butler, on 23 December 1897
- Martha Choquette (Shackett), daughter of Francis Choquette and Mary Breault, married William Godin (Gordon), son of Daucite Godin and Mathilda Richard, on 14 February 1899
- Malinda Choquette, daughter of Francis Choquette and Mary Brault, married Phil. Dubie, son of Joseph and Dranal Dubuc [*sic*], on 24 August 1902.

By now, the persistence of French-Canadian names is no surprise: *Eusebe*, *Emilie*, *Damase*, *Daucite*, and *Victorine* among the given names, for instance, and *Dion*, *Bourdeau*, *Lebrun* (not replaced by the *dit* name *Brown*), *Chartier*, *Breault*, *Godin*, and *Richard* among the family names. Some of the names are notionally French but may have been fully Anglicized when produced in speech: *Dominic*, *Alice*, *Adele*, *Paul*, *Irene*, and *Francis*.

But English names and onomastic assimilation are just as typical of the generation represented in these entries. Mathilda Richard Godin is not identified by the name *Mathilde*. At Martha's wedding in 1899, Francis Choquette's wife was named *Mary Breault*; at Malinda's wedding in 1902, she was the slightly assimilated *Mary Brault*, instead. And in the entries regarding these various Choquettes, *dit* names and aliases are frequently recorded, not only *Shackett* for *Choquette*, but also *Jones* for *Dion*, and *Gordon* for *Godin*. The Choquettes in question here often married, not only neighbors of French-Canadian heritage, but neighbors of non-French-Canadian descent: the Bushes, Palsas, Hudacks, Carls, and Butlers. One wonders if intermarriage with non-French-Canadians accelerated French-Canadian assimilation into American-English onomastic ways. One wonders if various unrelated or

distantly related Choquettes found it more difficult to resist assimilation of all kinds than the tightly related, multigenerational Beauregard clan. In any event, after 1902, no Choquettes were married at St Mary's, or at least, none are recorded in the register; there were, however fourteen Shackett weddings between 1906 and 1929. Indeed, when Evelyn Mary Adams married Ira James Pelletier on 11 August 1925, her mother is entered as *Harriet Shackett* — thirty-four years earlier, at her own wedding, she was still named *Choquette*.[7]

Besides specifics of interfamily and intrafamily identity, there are general reasons to change names, as well as to keep them. As André Lapierre argued recently

> the broad sociolinguistic context in which many French names evolved from their original to their present-day form can be defined by speech community contact, an environment whereby the original French onomastic stratum was brought into contact with a progressively dominant English-speaking society. As a result, the speakers of the dominant group had the option of either rejecting or retaining the legacy of French names. If they chose to reject this legacy, the resulting linguistic process was that of name deletion or name substitution. If, on the other hand, they opted to retain French names, then the process of retention was governed by integration rules, ranging from accommodation through translation to phoneme- or grapheme-based shifts. (2000: 235–36)

Some Middlebury French-Canadian names had, in fact, changed as a result of such social pressure in Canada, for instance, *Éthier* (from *Heretier*), *Filion* (from *Feuillon*), and *Fortier* (from *Forestier*) and emigrated intact; others underwent the same process for the same reasons once French Canadians arrived in Vermont, with results such as *Canton* (from *Quintin*). All of the French-Canadian names discussed in this article, from *Gee* to *Shackett*, simply seem to prove Lapierre's point.

But matters are not so simple. For instance, Catholic French-Canadians, however, were undoubtedly complicit in some of the change, as they attempted to minimize their religious identity in Protestant communities. W. E. Mockler (1956) suggested religious insecurity as one motive for surname change in late eighteenth-century trans-Allegheny Virginia. Gerard J. Brault writes specifically about French Canadian experience in New England: 'Like Catholic immigrants from other lands, French-Canadians continued to attend church in New England. Local clergymen and parishioners, who were predominantly Irish, sometimes welcomed them; often, however, the reception was cool and even unfriendly. Cultural differences, the language barrier, and rivalry among workers created these tensions' (1986: 68–69; see also Doty, 1985: 31). 'Agreeing' to onomastic accommodation to the dominant group served much more important social considerations, and the trick to effective change was to retain enough French quality to identify and differentiate, without seeming to differentiate oneself or one's social group absolutely from the larger community.

Certainly, though, French-Canadian immigrants in New England felt pressure to accommodate the dominant group, and names marked stigmatized social position. As Philippe Lemay, born near Montréal in 1856 and resident in Manchester, New Hampshire, when interviewed in 1938 explained, 'That's how I got into spinning. The overseer was kept at home by sickness and the second hand hired me. When the boss came back, I was giving all my attention to my work and not losing a minute. We all did that. But the overseer didn't look pleased and he was mad when his assistant told

him my name. He wanted to know why I had been hired when he didn't want any Frenchmen working there in his mill' (Doty, 1985: 18). When Lemay proposed himself for promotion to overseer of some of the spinning mills, his supervisor 'was so surprised that he couldn't speak for a long time . . . What! A Frenchman had the crust to think he could be an overseer! That was something unheard of, absolutely shocking' (Doty, 1985: 19). All of this was a not too polite invitation to assimilate, and some, like Lemay, obliged and were proud of it, especially of the fact that he and his family 'were able to speak English without a trace of accent' (Doty, 1985: 37).

In 1955, E. D. Johnson noted that retention of French names in Louisiana was in decline by that date; some Middlebury residents of French-Canadian heritage asserted their Frenchness by maintaining French names, both surnames and given names, for at least as long. The headstones of St Mary's thus record the following names: *Elzéar*, *Léon*, *Fabiola*, and *Clérina Brunet-Lamoureaux*; *Rolland* and *Marie Reine Chicoine*; *Gilbert* and *Nappallon Desjadon*; *Isidore*, *Édouard*, and *Émile Éthier*; and *Camille* and *Aurore Filion*. Although several such families established themselves in Middlebury in the late nineteenth century, members of those families listed here died in the late twentieth century.

Their predilection for French-Canadian names was doubtless reinforced by the regular waves of immigrants from Québec and Ontario in the early twentieth century, immigrants like the very French Felix and Cyprien J. Charron, sons of Telesphore Charron and Grace Quevillon. The former, baptized at the church of St Euphenie in Casselman, Ontario, married Jeanne Quesnel, also baptized in Casselman, so similarly an immigrant, the daughter of Alfred Quesnel and Delvina Huneault, on 5 August 1929. The latter, baptized at St Euphenie on 14 August 1909, married the utterly Anglicized Mary Arlene Gee, baptized in Winooski, Vermont, on 28 March 1917, daughter of William C. Gee and Esther S. Bent, on 12 August 1930. While much of the French that settled in Middlebury during the mid-nineteenth century had assimilated to New England speech by the twentieth century, new French names and the vibrant French-Canadian heritage of recent immigrants renewed somewhat Vermont affiliations with its neighbor to the north.

As Yves Roby writes, 'Emigration towards the United States constitutes, in the words of Albert Faucher, the seminal event in nineteenth century French-Canadian history. From 1840 to 1930, some 900,000 persons left Québec for the American Republic, with nearly two thirds of their number locating in New England' (2004: 1). Of those two-thirds, the overwhelming majority settled in Vermont: 5500 by 1840, 12,070 by 1850, and 16,580 by 1860, compared by that last year to 7490 settled in Maine, 1780 in New Hampshire, 7780 in Massachusetts, 1810 in Rhode Island, and 1980 in Connecticut (2004: 11). Clearly, proximity and opportunity determined much of the contrast among these settlement patterns. 'Francisse' Gee, who arrived in Middlebury in 1840, was in the vanguard of this settlement. By 1900, however, settlement in other New England states far outpaced that in Vermont, which undoubtedly supported the relative continuity of assimilation of French-Canadian descendants in Middlebury (see Brault, 1986: xvi).

But even in Middlebury, as suggested above, French-Canadian names continued to enter in the bulk migrations of the early twentieth century, during which French speakers throughout New England established communities that resisted assimilation, known as Les Petits Canadas, by developing their own systems of parochial schools,

for instance (see Doty, 1985: 126; Brault, 1986: 92, 95, and 126). As Armand Chartier notes, 'the collective behavior of the immigrants was hardly reassuring to Yankee purists who had vowed to preserve the identity of the nation faced with millions of immigrants from the four corners of the globe,' among whom the French-Canadians, who demonstrated 'reluctance to be naturalized' and erected 'a network of separate institutions ... were not about to be easily integrated, much less to become thoroughly Americanized in the near term' (1999: 71).

Underlying the New England experience was the French-Canadian ideology of *la survivance*, the maintenance of Canadian (and subsequently New England) Frenchness in the face of Anglo-American cultural dominance. 'The shrewdest maneuver in this strategy of *la survivance* was probably the linking of religion to the French language, since it allowed the notion of *la survivance* to endure well into the 1950s, after which awareness grew that one could exist without the other' (1999: 75). In fact, the grip of *la survivance* loosened considerably in the 1920s and 1930s, in the patriotic aftermath of World War I under pressure from anti-immigrant sentiment in the interwar period (see Roby, 2000: 319–26).[8]

When interviewed in 1938–1939 for the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), several Franco-Americans reflected on maintenance of French-Canadian identity in New England, or, its obverse, resistance to assimilation, linguistic and otherwise. Philippe Lemay, born near Montreal in 1856 and settled in Manchester, New Hampshire, answered the self-posed question, 'Why did our people leave Canada and come to the States?' as follows: 'Because they had to make sure of a living for their family and themselves for a number of years, and because they greatly needed money. The wages paid by textile mills was the attraction. Here and wherever else they went, they didn't like to become citizens and feared it for more than one reason. They didn't speak English, and that, let me tell you, was a big handicap' (Doty, 1985: 24). Indeed, David Morin, of Old Town, Maine, claimed, 'A lot of people who came to the States didn't intend to stay here. As soon as they had earned enough money to pay for their farms they went back to Canada. Some of them stayed here, and some of them came back again from Canada. When they come over here now they stay' (Doty, 1985: 71). The early lack of commitment to New England identity doubtless included linguistic identity. As a result, even if it was socially uncomfortable, many spoke French first and English second. When interviewed, David Morin's brother, Ovide, protested, 'I don't speak English very well, and maybe my wife could tell you more about things. If we could speak in French —' (Doty, 1985: 59). His FWP interviewer described Vital Martin, of Old Town, as 'A little above medium height, slim, and dark. Has good teeth and a scar on his left eyebrow. Talks with a pronounced French accent in spite of his years in Maine. Smokes cigars' (Doty, 1985: 91).

French-Canadian heritage, even stubborn allegiance to Canadian French, is not incompatible with New England identity. David Morin, for instance, 'was afraid [his] kids wouldn't be able to speak French when they grew up' and proposed to his wife, 'I'll make a trade with you: we'll speak only French in the house until the kids get big. Then they'll be able to speak it. They'll hear enough English outside' (Doty, 1985: 72). He felt no need to apologize for this plan, on ideological grounds:

> My children were born here and brought up here. What would you call them? Are they French, or Americans, or Yankees? What is a Yankee, anyway? The Indians are the only

> real Yankees, if you come right down to it. Who else has a right to be called a Yankee? I heard a speaker down here a while ago talking on that very subject. He said that the French in Maine are just as much Yankees as anyone. Why not? Look back through the histories and you'll see that the French were here just as soon as the English. (Doty, 1985: 72)

If Middlebury residents of French-Canadian descent felt similar pride in their heritage, there would have been no rush to full assimilation; both the headstones in St Mary's cemetery and the parish marriage register suggest that cultural affiliations were complex, and that change towards an American English standard was far from linear.

Beauregards and Choquettes settled in Middlebury during the 1860s and 1870s. Another Old Town resident, Father Wilfred Ouellette, remarked of their contemporaries, 'Many of the French Canadians who came to Maine sixty or seventy years ago were unable to speak English, but they could read and write French' (Doty, 1985: 93). It was only natural, then, that they supported French newspapers: 'The people who started them knew that they would lose money. They were people who obtained an income from some other source: they were lawyers, doctors, businessmen. They did it only because of their patriotism and their love of things French. They wished to help perpetuate the language and customs of the race' (Doty, 1985: 95). Both headstones and register, however, show that, in the midst of celebrating French-Canadian identity, Middlebury French gradually adopted an American-English onomastic identity, or something approximating one.

Thus the self-segregationist tendency gradually softened. By the time the Federal Writers' Project interviews were conducted, the ideology of Les Petits Canadas proved impossible to sustain. An anonymous 'Franco-American Grandmother' interviewed for the FWP, had lived in Manchester, New Hampshire, for more than fifty years, but had been raised in Canada. Interestingly, unlike many of those interviewed, she does not identify a natal town or baptismal parish. For her, even though, as she says, 'I remember what happened then as if it was yesterday' (Doty, 1985: 38), Canada is a generic place. Nevertheless, she frequently ornaments her statements with French words and phrases; she was a French speaker when she arrived in the United States. 'I had learned very little English,' she said,

> But I had always liked books, and I had been quite *appliquée* in my schoolwork at the convent in Canada. My young cousin was going to school here and, curiosity guiding me I think, I learned to read in English from her ... I decided to learn to speak English. I began to read the local English newspaper, then some reviews and magazines. One Saturday evening, I remember it was a soft spring night, I ventured to go to the public library. You may believe it was quite difficult at first; I had to resort often to the French-English dictionary. After a while, it became clearer, easier; and what a great feeling it was to understand what people were saying in the streets, in the stores, everywhere! (Doty, 1985: 41)

It was only natural that her own awakening would inform her perspective on linguistic heritage, on the relations between Canadian French and American English in a New England setting.

Though a slim state away, the grandmother's views are a pattern of Middlebury sentiment about those very interlinguistic issues, and the grandmother speaks eloquently for herself and for them all:

> Some time before, I had read in the dictionary this definition: '*Langue maternelle, langue du pays où l'on est né* (Maternal language, tongue of the country where one is born).' I resolved that my children would know primarily the language of this country — their own. These children born and brought up in an English-speaking country must speak English correctly and without any accent; they must be permitted and not reprimanded for speaking English at home, not only with their playmates; they must be given good English books to read, so that their vocabulary will be constantly enlarged, so that they can penetrate the soul and know the works of the greatest Americans, who have made this country the greatest of all the world. From now on, I looked forward; I was always proud of my French ancestry, but I 'Acclimated myself artificially.' I did not wish to live in the past; you cannot go very far nor advance very fast if you look behind you. (Doty, 1985: 42)

One imagines that many a French-Canadian grandmother in Middlebury felt the same and similarly promoted the assimilation of her own family, as survival in New England overcame nostalgia for *la survivance*.

A walk through St Mary's cemetery in Middlebury, Vermont, brings many French-Canadian names and their *dit* names to mind and raises many questions about the nature of onomastic variation and change in a small, multi-ethnic community. In this regard, Middlebury represents a type of New England town, indeed, a type of American town, and transcends itself. Ambling among headstones does not answer many questions, though, which is why I have had recourse to parish records and the region's social history. There are plenty of ways still to assess and reassess the onomastic material, for instance, in genealogy, or even in the records of those stonecutters who recorded and perhaps altered, intentionally or unintentionally, the French-Canadian names of deceased parishioners.

Though only a starting point, the headstones are nonetheless often unexpectedly rich sources of information, not least because of their very materiality: we suspect that most late nineteenth-century Choquettes were unrelated because their monuments are scattered throughout the cemetery; we can trace the family relations among contemporary Beauregards because their stones are in close proximity to one another. We know that Lebruns of one generation became Browns in the next because a stone with the heritage name *Lebrun* is immediately next to one with the *dit* name *Brown*, on the same plot.

One stone in her family's plot memorializes Elbertha Bessette, born in 1898 and dead less than a year later. *Elbertha* is a mildly Anglicized form of French-Canadian *Elberthe*, an onomastic concession to the dominant English-speaking community. Loss of the infant must have been hopelessly sad to her parents at the time, but memory fades and with it pain, and French-Canadian heritage erodes underfoot as Time marches on. On a much later family stone, located immediately next to that devoted to her alone, Elbertha is renamed *Alberta*, assimilated in step with the rest of her family, though she had died decades earlier. One could encounter evidence for the same story in parish records, I suppose, though seeing the same person

represented differently on two headstones immediately next to each other better presents the interpenetration of memory and change. Somehow, it grips the imagination more urgently when names are cut in unforgiving marble than when the scholar, anxious to find still more names, turns the page.

Notes

[1] Scribes of every kind have tended to alter others' unfamiliar names, sometimes deliberately, sometimes from ignorance, almost always for the sake of expedience. Cecily Clark considers some of the problems in her account of Middle English names (1992: 544–51). The problems were much the same in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century New England, as a resident of Old Town, Maine would report in the late 1930s: 'There wasn't any resident priest in Old Town then. A priest went around to four different towns: Orono, Old Town, Milford, and Bradley. When a child was baptized, the parents had to take it to wherever the priest was at that time. I don't know where they took me. It might have been in any one of those four places. I never could find any records anyway. I think that the priest was Irish in those days. He couldn't pronounce the French names very well, and they said when he got one he couldn't pronounce at all, he baptized the child something else' (Doty, 1985: 65). In spite of the cultural arrogance suggested by the anecdote, which may, after all, reflect as much prejudice against the Irish as Irish prejudice against the French (see Chartier, 1999: 72), one can't help but feel some sympathy for the overworked priest who took occasional interlinguistic shortcuts.

[2] After the decree *Tametsi* was promulgated in 1563 by the Council of Trent, the Roman church insisted that marriages were valid only when performed in the presence of a priest and witnesses. A French notary, Michel-Gilbert Gaumin, having encountered some difficulty in obtaining pastoral approval for his own marriage, devised this subterfuge: with plenty of witnesses around and with the priest present, he and his bride simply declared that they were married, and the provisions of *Tametsi* satisfied. From that point forward, those who did not wish to confront parental or pastoral interference in their marriages would exchange vows before witnesses while the priest, unaware of this nuptial activity in the rear pews, celebrated Mass and was thus 'present' at the marriage. *Mariages à la gaumine* were frequent in pre-Canadian Québec and many of them were later rehabilitated, according to the rules (see Auclair [1901]). For an account of traditional French-Canadian marriage, see Brault (1986: 34–36).

Entries in the marriage repertoire of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in Middlebury, Vermont, are presented alphabetically in Fisher, Sevigny, and others (2004); as a result, I do not indicate page numbers parenthetically for this source.

[3] A *dit* name is a name used in place of a French heritage name in an English-speaking community. Some *dit* names are mild phonetic alterations of their French-Canadian originals, while others are false cognates, others calques (that is, loan translations), and some simply convenient names with no connection to the original. For example, 'Well, my name is Magloire Pelletier. I suppose that sentence ought to be at the first end of the story instead of the last end, but it's better late than never. Mike is a nickname that they call me for short. My last name is Pelletier, but sometimes I spell it Pelkey. Mitchell is just the English way of saying my first name' (Doty, 1985: 88); and '*I asked Mr. Green about a Frank Wedge who lived across the street . . . I remarked that the name Wedge didn't sound French*. That is the English of it. In French it would be Aucoin. Yes, Green wouldn't be called a French name, either. In French it would be *Grenier*. I always had to explain how that was spelled, so I started to use the English way of it' (Doty, 1985: 101). Such alterations accommodated English speakers, yet those of French-Canadian heritage, even French speakers, adopted the *dit* names, which certainly promoted onomastic variation even within small communities and affected the tempo of onomastic change. For example, 'My disappointed former friends had another shock of the same kind two years later when Théophile Marchand — we called him Tofil — was named overseer of weaving, and he was included with me in their hate' (Doty, 1985: 20). For a compendium of common *dit* names from Canadian French, see Quintin (1993).

[4] Roger Lass (1992: 67–90) provides an excellent account of Germanic and Romance Stress Rules and the phonology that underlies them.

[5] According to the local telephone directory, ten households in Middlebury and neighboring towns bear the name *Ouimette* and one *Ouimet*; there is also a listing for a law firm, Ouimette and Runcie, in Vergennes, though presumably the partner named is one of the local residents bearing that name (see *Verizon* [2007]).

[6] *Willett* has a complicated history in English: it is first introduced as an English version of the French diminutive *Guillot* (from *Guillaume*) sometime after the Norman Conquest, when William and various forms were understandably popular (see Baring-Gould [1910: 251] and Hanks and Hodges [1988: 577, s.v. **Will**]). This earlier *Willett* is etymologically unrelated to the North American *dit* name in question here; Willett is thus an example of a single *dit* name for two etymological names.

[7] On the strength of the marriage register alone, one might conclude that, in the twentieth century, *Choquette* has become a palimpsest of French-Canadian heritage in Middlebury. The local telephone directory suggests otherwise: nine households listed there bear the family name *Choquette*, though none lives in the town of Middlebury (see *Verizon* [2007]). Without detailed information on settlement and genealogy, it is impossible to determine whether ancestors of the current Choquettes were Middlebury residents unremarked in the marriage register (for any number of reasons) who maintained the French-Canadian family name, or were Choquettes whose grandparents were Shacketts but who rehabilitated the French-Canadian name, or are descendants of French-Canadians who moved to the Burlington/Middlebury area after *Shackett* had been 'inscribed' culturally over traditional *Choquette*.

[8] Ethnicity may play a hidden role in maintenance of French-Canadian forms, as some of those buried in St Mary's cemetery may have descended from converted French or French-Canadian Jews. While non-Jews were perfectly entitled to take Old Testament or Hebraic names, some such names tended to reflect Jewish heritage, among them *Isidore* (as in *Isidore Éthier* and *Isidore Malzac*), *Moses* (as in *Moses Marcille*), and *Roch Misael* (as in *Roch Misael Malzac*) (see Hanks and Hodges [1990: 167 and 242, s.v. **Isidore** and **Moses**]). A sense that some specific ethnic heritage should be maintained may have promoted maintenance of names among some families in the context of general accommodation to English dominance in Middlebury and its environs.

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