

French came to city in a 'fever'

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In 1900, Fall River had a population of about 100,000 people, of whom some 40,000 were French.

As the city continues to change — as it has always done — it may be that someday Spanish and Khmer will be to Fall River what Portuguese is now.

Portuguese is probably the language spoken by a majority of the city's bilingual inhabitants, but it wasn't always so.

In the mid- and late 1800s, cotton mills in Fall River roared day and night. Mills full of machinery needed hands to tend that machinery. Fall River looked to the north, where hard-working French Canadian farmers with traditionally large families were willing to leave their stony acres in search of a better life.

The wave of emigration that struck the small towns and farms of French Canada was so large that French Canadian writers of the time called it a "fever."

In Quebec, this immigration fever would cost the province one out of every four citizens. Mill owners actively recruited in Canada, sending agents north to induce whole families to come to New England.

In cities like Fall River, the arriving French Canadians could also be likened to a wave.

In 1868, A French priest, the Rev. A.J. Derbuel, stayed temporarily at St. Mary's Cathedral. Interested in the French presence in Fall River, the good father counted 100 French families in the city.

A year later, when St. Anne's

Parish was founded, there were 500 or 600 French families in the city.

By the early 1900s, the flood of immigration from Canada had radically altered Fall River. In 1900, Fall River had a population of about 100,000 people, of whom some 40,000 were French.

As late as the 1930s, Fall River retained a decisively French character. During those Depression years, as part of the Works Progress Administration, the federal government hired unemployed writers to produce a series of state guides. The guide to Massachusetts' entry for Fall River notes that, after English, the language most often heard on the street in Fall River is French.

At their peak, St. Anne's Church and Notre Dame de Lourdes parishes both had 10,000 or more members.

Throughout the New England states, French immigrants developed their own churches, schools, newspapers, cultural and political organizations and social clubs.

In Fall River, whole sections of the city were French and the

Flint neighborhood, in particular, was a stronghold of French culture.

In Fall River, a French language newspaper, *L'Independent*, flourished from 1884 to 1963, eventually meeting the fate of all ethnic newspapers in America as the older generation of immigrants died off and left behind descendants who spoke only English.

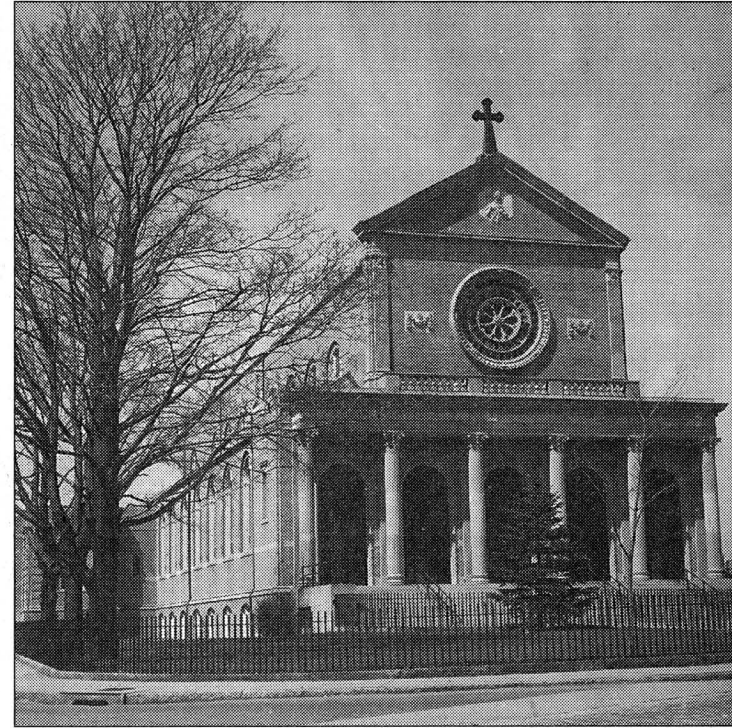
As in all cities with a noticeable French Canadian population, Fall River was blessed with a number of French-based churches and schools.

St. Anne's Parish was founded in 1869, Notre Dame in 1874, St. Mathieu in 1887, Blessed Sacrament in 1892, St. Roch in 1899 and St. Jean Baptiste in 1901. All French parishes boasted elementary schools where part of the day's instruction was in French.

To complete the educational process, the French established high schools for girls and boys, including Dominican Academy, Jesus-Mary Academy and Monsignor Prevost.

Over the decades, numerous French Canadians and their descendants have risen to prominent positions on Fall River, including Edmund P. Talbot, who was mayor from 1923-26 and again in 1929-30. Roland G. Desmarais was the city corporation counsel and assistant district attorney. He served as mayor for two consecutive terms, from 1964 to 1967.

The current mayor of Fall River, Edward M. Lambert Jr. is Franco-American, as is City



Herald News File Photo

St. Jean Baptiste Church, founded in 1901, is seen in this 1947 photo. French Canadians immigrated to Fall River in droves at the turn of the 20th century — in fact, one out of four Quebecois left Canada then, many of them bound for the mills in this area.

Councilor Leo O. Pelletier.

Eminent among early Franco-Americans was Hugo A. Dubuque, a journalist, author and lawyer who went on to a seat on the Superior Court.

Two towering figures in Franco-American life are Monsignor Jean A. Prevost, pastor of Notre Dame from 1888 until his death in 1925 and of Very Rev. Alexis-Raymond Grolleau, who became pastor of St. Anne's in 1901. Both men built monumental churches, schools and

hospitals.

From the names in the telephone book, names like Bouchard and Gelineau, to the statue of the Marquis de Lafayette in Lafayette Park, Fall River retains, if not its full population of French speakers, then certainly a flavor left here by the "canadiennes" who came to work the mills.

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