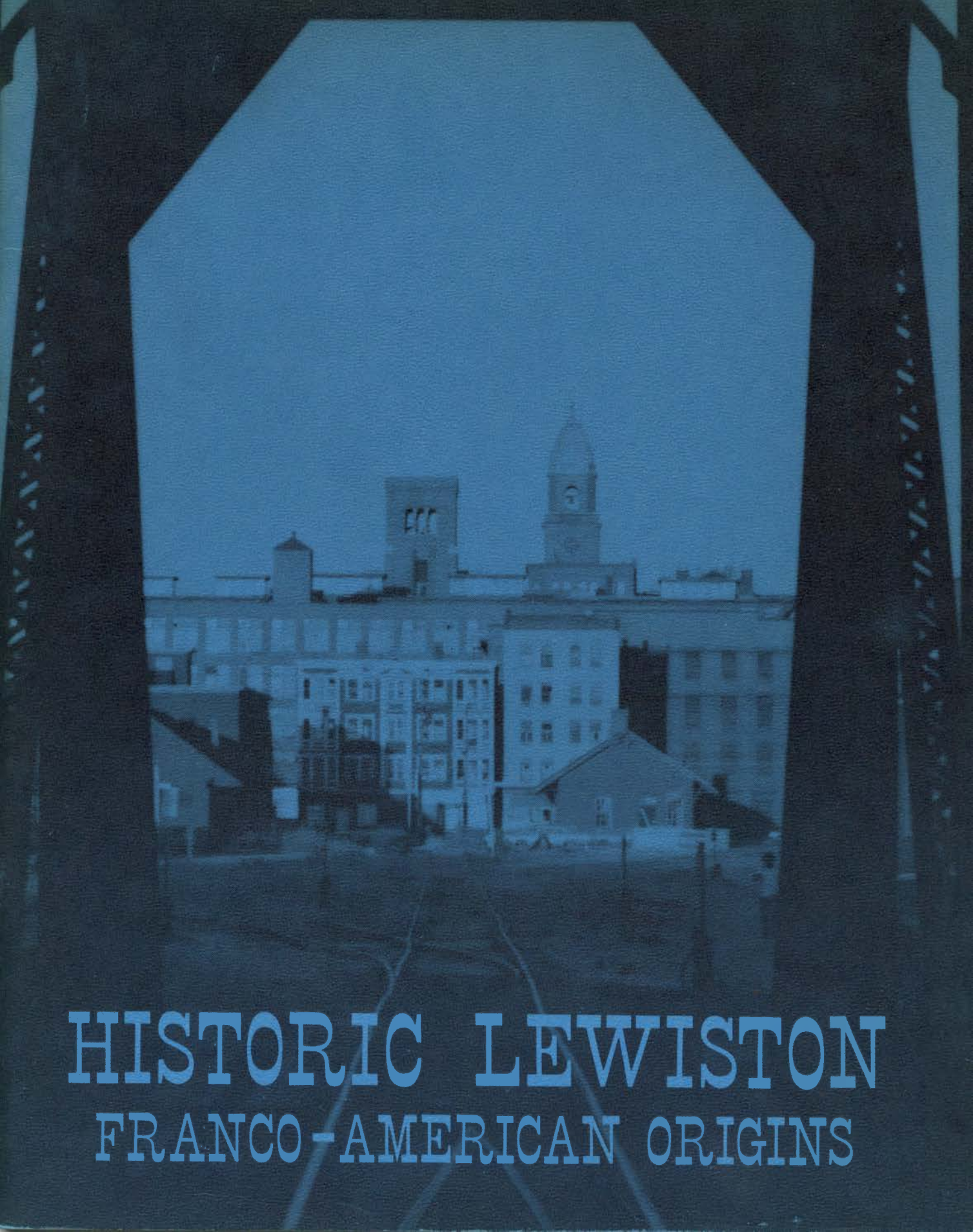

HISTORIC LEWISTON

FRANCO-AMERICAN ORIGINS

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FRANCO-AMERICAN ORIGINS

PRINTED FOR THE LEWISTON HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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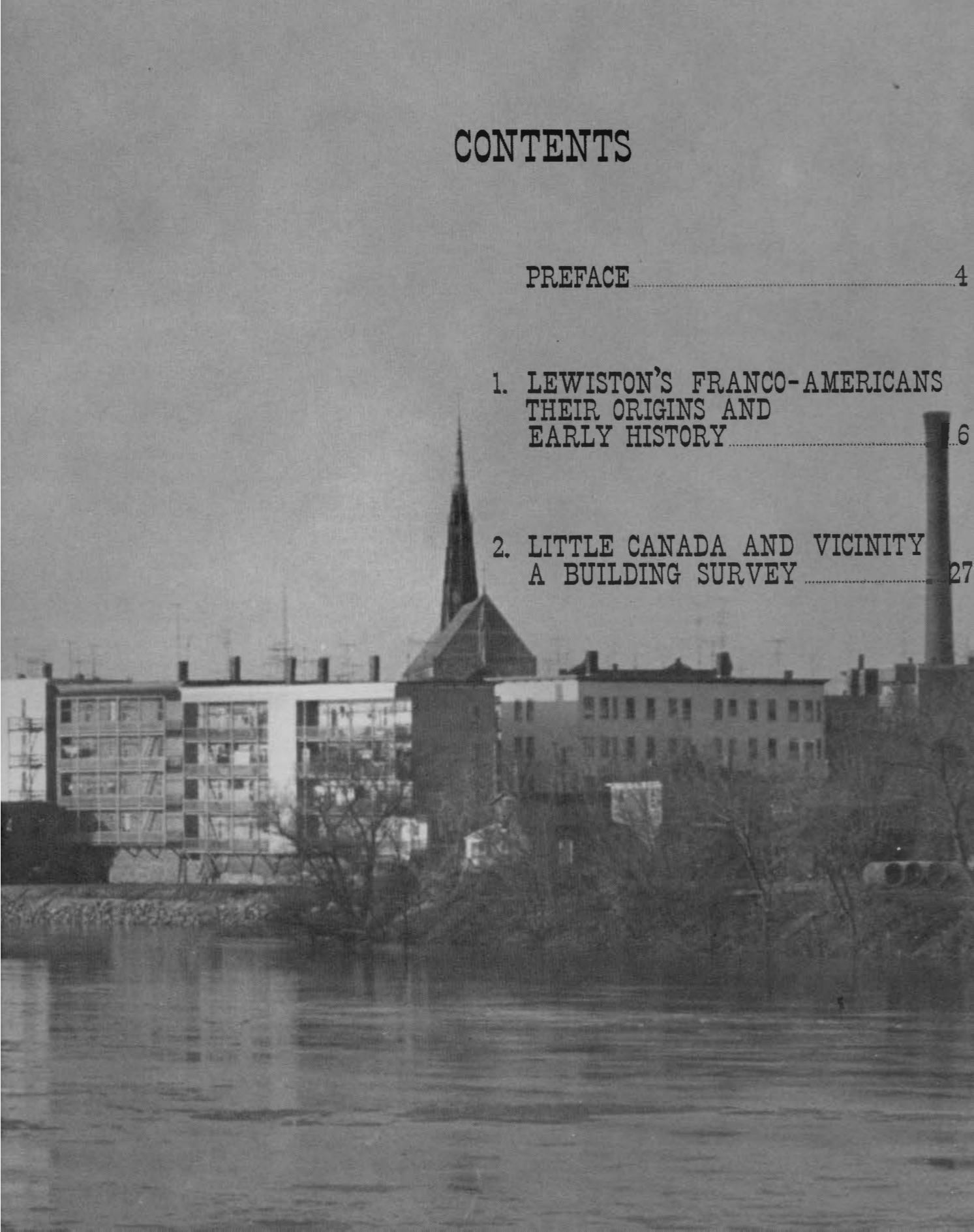

PREFACE

When Mayor John Beliveau created the Lewiston Historical Commission in 1969, he charged it with the task of discovering and commemorating events and places significant in Lewiston's past. The Historical Commission is seeking to fulfill this charge by publishing a series of short studies on different aspects of the city's history.

This pamphlet is the first of the series, and it emphasizes one of Lewiston's outstanding characteristics, its Franco-American heritage. In the first section of this study, Miss Charlotte Michaud, assisted by Mr. Adelard Janelle, explains when and why the French-Canadians came to Lewiston and describes the manner of life that these early immigrants led. It is an account of particular significance for the 60% of Lewiston's population that come from French-speaking homes. It is also significant for anyone seeking a better understanding of Lewiston and its inhabitants.

Miss Michaud and Mr. Janelle are admirably qualified to speak for Lewiston's Franco-Americans. Mr. Janelle is a well-known leader in several of the French social organizations, such as Institut Jacques Cartier and Union Saint Jean Baptiste. The Canadian Council of French Language and the New England Franco-American Committee have awarded him special recognition for his outstanding service to the French-speaking community.

Miss Michaud is a newspaper woman of forty year's experience, chiefly in Lewiston. She entered the newspaper profession quite naturally because her father had been a writer for Lewiston's French language newspaper, Le Messager," for most of his life. Although Miss Michaud and Mr. Janelle are retired, they are both very active participants in the life of the city and in its Franco--American community.

The second portion of this pamphlet describes a variety of buildings and structures in the section of the city most closely identified with the Franco--American population. Photography is by Mr. Gridley Barrows, an architect with the firm of Alonzo J. Harriman Associates, Inc. Mr. James S. Leamon, associate professor of history at Bates College, supplied the text.

Basically this second part is an architectural survey, one that tries to relate the buildings and their styles to the life and times of those who lived there. The area surveyed includes the Grand Trunk Railway Station, the point of entry; the Continental mill and the mill blocks; Saint Mary's Church; "Little Canada"; and all the way to the gas works.

Admittedly the area around the gas works used to be Irish territory, and few French dared to go there uninvited. This building survey does go that far, however, because the proximity of the gas works to "Little Canada" offers an irresistible opportunity to emphasize some unusual structures there. In addition, including this area recalls a rapidly disappearing characteristic of early Lewiston, its segregated nature. Undoubtedly the contemporary merging of Lewiston's ethnic groups is a desirable example of social and economic mobility. However, such mobility often comes at the expense of a rich cultural tradition.

It is in recognition of this fact that the Lewiston Historical Commission presents this pamphlet concerning Lewiston's predominent ethnic group.

The Historical Commission is grateful for the assistance of a large number of people and organizations. Of particular value was the cooperation of the Lewiston Public Library, the Board of Assessors, and the city's Planning Department, one of whose members, Mr. Gerald Raymond, drew the maps. Special recognition must go to Mr. Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. of Portland, architectural historian, whose enthusiasm and advice was indispensable. Publication of this pamphlet is made possible through financial assistance from the Maine Commission on the Arts and Humanities and from Lewiston's city government.

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LEWISTON'S FRANCO-AMERICANS
THEIR ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY

by

MISS CHARLOTTE MICHAUD

assisted by

MR. ADELARD JANELLE

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"Why is so much French spoken on Lewiston streets?," a newcomer is likely to ask. "French names are on store fronts and on professional buildings, and they dominate in your directories. In public offices it's the same." The Lewiston resident, long-accustomed to this reaction, is startled that it is still so apparent. It is surprising also to those who are responsible for the French character of the city. They think it is disappearing, a fact their leaders bewail and try to correct.

There is no written history about the local French people except what was printed in the newspaper that they supported for more than half a century, in church records, and in anniversary publications, but all of these were written in French for readers using that language daily. No one else was interested prior to recent years. All of a sudden scholars throughout the state began studying the people who settled here over 100 years ago. In Lewiston they have dominated in numbers for years and continue to comprise the majority of its population.

Only one of their number can truly describe what type of person these French were. Since none survive who lived through the early migration days in this city, their story can only be told from hearsay; and this is what your writer will try to report in this publication, which is written in English that it may obtain wider readership. This writer feels competent to write about the Lewiston French because she was born of them, lived their life, and observed them through 45 years of newswriting, but would never presume to write about the French who settled in Biddeford, Rumford, Waterville, or any other Maine community where French residents settled.

The French, as they are generally referred to (rather than Franco-Americans which they have become), are descendants of explorers and settlers who came across the Atlantic in the 17th century. These explorers gave French names to many localities in the United States, but their followers eventually settled in Canada to colonize that part of this hemisphere.

After 150 years they lost their Canadian holdings to Great Britain, but were strong enough at the signing of the treaty in 1763 to obtain a concession from the conquerors that the French residents who remained could enjoy freedom of speech and religion. This detail is important to understand why Franco--Americans have such ingrained tenacity to preserve their language.

Many of the early French settlers remained in Canada after the "conquest" (as they always refer to the end of that war), but they were unhappy under the rule of people whose language they didn't speak and didn't care to learn. They closed ranks and tried to continue to live according to the ways of their forefathers. While governed by their own people, they had endured many hardships, but were sustained by the hope that from generation to generation conditions would improve. In pioneer days they had lived on wilderness grants they had developed by felling trees and clearing the land before farming operation could begin. A rough dwelling housed them, and the entire family worked to operate small farms, mainly to keep alive and warm in a country of long winters.

Women always helped in the fields besides attending to household duties that included weaving of materials to be made into clothing for the family.

These people lived without ever handling much money. Needs were fulfilled through barter.

Families averaged at least a dozen children. Men usually married twice. At the death of the first wife it was expected that the man remarry, if only to bring up the children of the first marriage. A widowed mother remarried for the same reason. Children of both marriages were brought up together as one family. When children married, they were given a corner of the family land holdings. Marriages were usually arranged by the parents, including a dowry and marriage contract. The young couple frequently remained in the family homestead and tilled its corner of the land until able to build a home, where another large family was raised. This practice reduced the size of each farm, making it increasingly difficult for all to earn a living. More daughters than sons generated further hardship for the families. Moving to a village or city offered no solution since the sole form of employment available for women was to become a servant in another's home. French-Canadians, clinging to Old World mores, considered it improper for their womenfolk to be employed at any form of work outside the family home, except out of dire necessity.

THEY COME TO MAINE

Such circumstances led to migration to this country, and the French--Canadians began coming to Maine in the early part of the 19th Century. They came by way of Jackman. They came in such numbers that the French--Canadian clergy found it necessary to send "missionaries" to minister to these people during their temporary stays in our state.

The men came first to work between farming seasons in lumber camps and building operations where their unfamiliarity with the English language was no handicap. Some helped build our State Capitol when Maine separated from Massachusetts in 1820.

Such employment gave the French-Canadians opportunity to observe that this state offered better economic conditions and more comfortable ways of living. They began to think of moving their families here. Development of railway travel and recruitment of labor by the infant textile industry spurred them further, and they came in droves, not only to Maine, but to wherever industry and commerce indicated opportunity for employment.

Textile work required little or no training; some of it resembling what the women had been doing at home, such as carding and weaving. In Canada it was considered demeaning for women to work outside the home, but in Maine only those who were doing likewise would know.

They first came convinced it would be only for a short while, long enough to pay off a mortgage on village property or farm or to accumulate reserve funds, but they liked the country, its way of life, and especially the fact that freedom of speech as well as choice of school and church were guaranteed in the Constitution of this new country. As in Canada those early immigrants learned that

rights secured by treaty or by constitution were not always respected by residents, but the French found it easier to overlook in this country than in Canada.

Migrating French-Canadians usually settled among relatives, friends, or former neighbors, either coming together from Canada or joining those who had preceded them. They chose those with whom they were going to live, and through the close associations they enjoyed, they strengthened their characteristics so that each French community developed an individuality.

One thing is common among the French. They are industrious and fun-loving. They are Catholics from 'way back. Their early homes bore testimony to that. The decor was always one of religious inspiration. Assurance of an existing church and school always guided their choice of location when a move was being considered.

After the father had come to Lewiston to find a home, the mother and children travelled by train to alight at the Grand Trunk Station on Lincoln Street. A local resident recalls that when his family arrived, the mill bell tolled on the meal hour. "On your knees," commanded the father, and there on the station platform the entire family recited the "Angelus."

This writer's grandmother was one who arrived with her eleven children. With her was a Canadian neighbor-mother with an equal number of children. My mother's folks were late comers - 1880 or so, therefore no rents were available on Lincoln Street nor on the immediately adjoining streets. My maternal grandfather had bought a house to receive them in New Auburn - across the South Bridge.

Lincoln Street was then the center of French life in Lewiston. A small chapel across from the railway station was already serving the Irish Catholics who had preceded the French to the city. There was a school taught in French by the Canadian Sisters of Charity, commonly called the Grey Nuns, who are still here, but have long-since turned their activities to the care of children, the aged, and the sick. Before their arrival several young women amoung the early settlers had taught French-speaking children in their homes, with 50 to 60 in a class.

These people spoke French at home and in school, dealt with their own in commerce and the professions in French, and listened to French in church; but at work English was a requisite until some French men became bosses. Thereafter French prevailed there too.

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

The French applied themselves to learning English. Among the earlier residents only the Jewish made the effort to learn enough French to deal with these newcomers. The French-Canadians learned what English words they needed the most, which resulted in complicated conversation. Frequently it made them appear to be uncouth, even rude, but if communication could have

been established in French, it would have revealed them to be polite and cultured in both speech and manner. Misunderstandings often led to ridicule, occasionally to resentment. Other instances provide some humor. A resident of English descent relates that the sign "loyer" that he frequently saw on buildings meant "lawyer" to him as a child, and he decided the legal profession must be a profitable one. "Loyer" was the French word indicating that a "rent" was available.

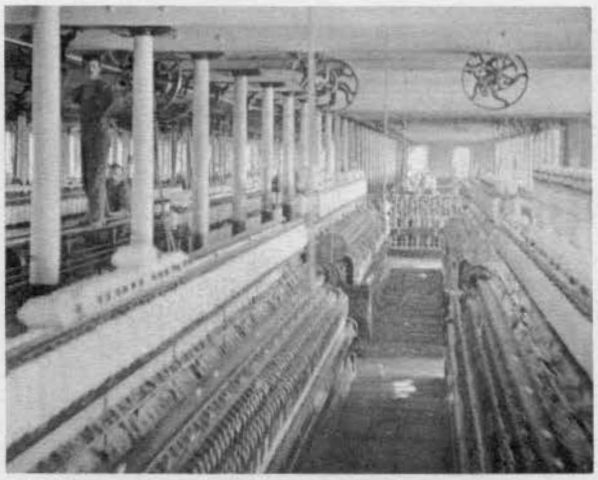
Acquaintances developed in time among the English-speaking and the French-speaking, despite the fact conversations were necessarily limited. Early Americans went to church "meetings" Tuesday nights, and one of them pointed out to a French acquaintance the building where he went to "meeting". The Frenchman spread that information among his people, mispronouncing the word so that it sounded more like "mitaine," which is French for "mitten". For years any church except their own was called a "mitaine" by local French residents.

Generally the French-Canadians lived among themselves. There were enough of them even in the early years to establish a community of their own within the municipality.

EMPLOYMENT

In that era, when girls married at 16 and were considered old maids by age 25, employment came early. A child looked forward to leaving school so that he or she might be considered adult enough to go to work and contribute to the family finances. There were no child labor laws, and it was not uncommon for pre-teenagers to begin working in the mills. There are some living still who recall such employment as not unpleasant. The work was light and there was much time for play, even within the confines of the mill. Women recall that their childhood work consisted of carting bobbins in wheeled containers from one area to another at certain intervals. Between these tasks they played in whatever free space was available, singing and dancing to the tunes that have entertained children at all times.

At right, Joseph LeBlanc, founder of the Lewiston Steam Dye House, oldest local firm founded by a Franco-American.



Interior view of Lewiston Mill

Boys had different tasks, such as oiling various parts of machinery, and played ball daily. All were punished if the work was poorly done, but only by curtailment of play time. Although they were paid little more than two or three dollars a week, their satisfaction was great in having attained adult status by holding a job and bringing home a salary to contribute to the family welfare.

Among the adult French men and women, there were some who aspired to what they considered a higher level of employment than in the textile mills. They gravitated toward the shoe factories, a growing industry here at the time; but one had to be a bit affluent because employment there required a period of unpaid training. Others dedicated themselves to improving their knowledge of English to become store clerks. Merchants soon placed a card in their store windows indicating "on parle francais," and clerks thereafter had little use for the English they had studied so arduously. Franco-Americans who later went into business for themselves usually had to start as clerks. Others went into insurance selling among their own people and gradually into every field of community endeavor.

Joseph LeBlanc established the Lewiston Steam Dye House, the oldest local firm founded by a Franco-American. The business is still being carried on by his grandchildren. Mr. LeBlanc made important technical modifications in the cleaning process. The standard machine had a drum that revolved only in one direction thereby snarling the clothes inside. Mr. LeBlanc conceived a means to rotate the drum back and forth. He did not patent the process however. Salesmen who observed his improvements while visiting the plant, spread the word, and it is now a general practice in cleaning establishments.

They progressed in their knowledge and use of the English language until most of them became completely bilingual, moving from French to English and vice versa with the greatest of ease. This writer was the first of such linage to be employed by a newspaper published locally in English, was employed also by Portland newspapers, and wrote in French for Canadian and local newspapers throughout a period that lasted for 45 years.

THE BLACK SHEEP

One should not deduce from the above that all these people were "saints", as they would say themselves. There were some who considered mill employment demeaning, but they had no funds to engage in commerce and no skill for the trades. Maine was a prohibition state, but some of these new residents heard that trade was being carried on in spirituous liquors.

Some sought employment with established "rum-sellers," as they were then called, and they were welcomed, probably for the prospect of the French trade they might bring. Tradition had made light liquors familiar to these people who had no qualms about making their own wine, prohibition or not. A family party or major celebration without such was unthinkable to them. They didn't condone intemperance, and they generally practiced moderation.

After learning methods of illicit traffic in liquor, some of these early French residents went into business for themselves and prospered. It lowered their prestige amoung their own, but they redeemed themselves somewhat by being generous when approached for donations to any worthy cause. However, their descendants still bear some taint. Let them misbehave, even slightly, and someone is sure to recall the ancestral business.

Clergymen naturally lectured against these rum-sellers in their church sermons. One of them was still being quoted years afterward. He had admonished the law-breakers to refrain from selling liquor, at least on Sundays, adding, "and don't think you are gaining indulgences by selling on week-days," which indicated to his listeners that he did not condone it on week-days either.

It was common practice to look to the parish priest and his assistants for aid of all kinds. The parish priest was the counselor on all matters temporal and spiritual. He visited his parishioners in their homes, was acquainted with all of their problems, and served as lawyer, architect, doctor, and what-not, as observed in early parish records. The parish priest even served as banker for many of the early residents. Distrustful of strangers and unacquainted with English-speaking citizens, they did business only among their own. There were no French-Canadians employed in local banks for many years, so the immigrants turned their surplus money over to their church pastor for safe-keeping.

GEORGE CARIGNAN

The first French-Canadian to settle in Lewiston came from Canada in 1860, and many joined him, rapidly swelling the population of both cities. Tradesmen, builders, and professionals followed, realizing the influx of these many laborers would generate a need for their services. A daughter of the first settler, George Carignan, married Joseph LeBlanc, an early settler and founder of a clothes cleaning establishment that is being maintained by the same family after 100 years in business.

Early residents honored an old tradition whereby all working members of the family automatically turned their salaries over to the father. Each child was rewarded with a small allowance, and the father assumed responsibility for all financial affairs of the family. This factor contributed to eventual prosperity. It became possible for the family to either buy the "block" in which they lived or to build one of their own. Many modern day landlords inherited such properties from their forebears.

As the family economic conditions improved, mothers were the first to forsake employment outside the home. There was much to keep them occupied there, providing food, hot water, clothing, and heat at a time when many present-day facilities were non-existent. Refrigeration was unknown, so the buying of food was a daily chore. Those who continued to work outside the home were occupied from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., never seeing sunlight except in the summer.

Early merchants report residents of French descent were annoyed if a bill was sent to them. They took it as a reflection on their willingness to pay. Those early migrants met their financial obligations, and one didn't hear of people borrowing money. It would have been frowned upon as indicating bad management. If emergencies arose one borrowed within the family and repaid as quickly as possible.

EDUCATION

One frequently hears that early French-Canadians cared little about education. Facts disprove this. These people contributed to the cost of local public schools from the time they arrived, but they derived little or no benefit from them through choice. They went to extra expense to provide their own schools, where, in addition to subjects taught in public schools, their children would receive instruction in religion as well as in the French language and allied subjects.

Children were admitted to parochial school at six years of age, so some parents sent five-year olds to public school, but only for one year. In parochial school all instruction was in French, except English grammar and American history. Everyone was proud to attend parochial school. It was impressed on all that it was a privilege. Parents paid tuition for each child and an additional small fee for book rental. Children were taught to use the respectful French pronoun to parents and treated teaching nuns and brothers with even greater respect. To them members of religious orders were one degree higher than parents and go-betweens to God. Under such conditions discipline was easily obtained.

School days were long 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., except for lunchtime and recess. Considerable homework was assigned daily and even more for the weekends. Elementary instruction included the traditional grammar school subjects plus religion, church Latin, French and Canadian history, and American his-

tory. Grammar, reading, and spelling were studied in both French and English. Nevertheless, graduates of the parochial schools had difficulty obtaining employment locally except among their own people or through political pressure.

The Dominican nuns added a two-year advanced course after a few years of teaching here. Classes were held all day to give the equivalent of the public school four-year course which occupied half-day sessions only.

Those few among the French who went on to public school after graduating from grammar grades in parochial school did observe dissimilarities between the two systems. Public school children used the "Palmer" method of writing, while the French had been taught the European style of penmanship with many flourishes and the crossing of the figure seven, as is still done in Europe. They adapted rapidly when public school teachers read their seven's as four's and their "X's" as "S-c."

Early French-Canadians didn't send their children to advanced studies as quickly as their English-speaking fellow residents, but the reason was economic. Their families were going through a period of immigration and settlement, as had earlier generations. As French-Canadians and Franco-Americans became more financially secure, they sent their children to higher educational institutions. It took several years for this to become generally apparent because parents usually sent their children to convents and colleges in Canada. These were boarding schools where instruction was given from elementary grades to preparation for the professions--"convents" for girls; "colleges" for boys.

SCHOOLS, CHURCHES

For their local schools and churches the French-Canadians first used existing buildings, but they soon constructed their own. The first of these, in 1882-3, was the so-called Dominican block at the corner of Lincoln and Chesnut Streets, which retains its original lines, though not its original uses, and has since frequently changed ownership. Through the years the people built additional schools and churches, tearing them down when they became too small and building larger and more beautiful ones.

The mother parish was sub-divided many times to form St. Louis in Auburn, St. Mary's, Holy Cross, and Holy Family parishes in Lewiston and later Sacred Heart and St. Philip's, both in Auburn. With one exception all these parishes began as French-speaking congregations, each with its own church and school. Only St. Philip's was founded as a bilingual parish with school facilities for religious instruction only.

French-speaking residents contributed the funds that paid for the churches and schools. These people were reticent, to say the least, to reveal their financial condition; but with their pastors serving as custodians of their finances, it was embarrassing for the early residents to claim they could not make a sizeable contribution to the building of a church or school. This was one of the reasons that caused them to deposit money in local banks.

However, even before families became affluent by their own admission many of them suffered untold sacrifices to educate one of their members for the priesthood and deprived themselves of the earning power of a daughter who chose to enter the religious life.

Parents and children who lacked schooling were the most insistent about providing it for others in the family. They were fortunate in staffing their schools and churches because members of religious orders were readily available from France in the early part of this century. This was when France was secularizing its schools and banishing members of long-established religious orders from the country. Consequently local residents were able to obtain Marist Brothers to teach the boys and later the Ladies of Sion. The latter taught several years in Lewiston-Auburn parochial schools and maintained convent boarding schools as they had done in England and France. At that time SS. Peter and Paul's, the first so-called "national" parish established in Lewiston in 1871, served all French-speaking residents of both cities.

Dominican monks came from France in 1881 to administer the parish as they still do. The Dominican nuns arrived in 1904 to direct St. Peter's school and continued to do so for 50 years. They also maintained a convent boarding school for several years, later expanding to Sabattus where they still have a convent. Today the parochial schools are taught by members of various religious orders and by several lay teachers as well.

FAMILY LIFE

The early residents lived an intensely religious life. Prayers were said at home, privately in the morning and by the entire family usually after supper. Devotion to the family unit was rigidly observed. Children cared for widowed parents; many of them forsaking marriage or the religious life to do so. Frequently men abstained from marriage to provide for a widowed mother. Girls did it regularly for either parent.

It was customary for parents to "give" themselves to one of their children. This meant they gave all of their property to one child in exchange for support and care until the end of their life. Usually the youngest offspring would accept that obligation; but this occasionally led to friction among other children in the family, who either felt slighted or complained that parents became more like servants than privileged residents in their chosen home. The practice has long become extinct.

It was not unusual for an older child to take on the responsibility of bringing up several brothers and sisters. The writer had a classmate who was 13 when her mother died. She immediately left school, brought up her many brothers and sisters, and then married. Her youngest sister died in childbirth some years later and she offered to bring up the surviving child, but the widowed brother-in-law assumed that responsibility.

Sunday was the most important day of the week, featured by attendance at

Mass. A certain ritual or etiquette strictly guided such attendance. Women preceded men down church aisles; men always occupied the aisle seat in the family pew. Unmarried women seeking entry would tap the man's shoulder with a gloved hand, at which signal the man would arise, step into the aisle to clear passage into the pew, then resume his aisle seat. Women wore their best finery; men wore silk hats and Prince Albert cutaways. Just prior to the end of the service, as if responding to a signal, the men would leave in a body to prepare the horse and buggy most families owned for transportation. The women would leave the church at the completion of the service and join their men outside. It would have been reprehensible for any woman to leave the church earlier.

Every family member was expected to join some church group. Boys served at the altar. Girls enrolled in Children of Mary sodalities; male youths in St. Dominic's Association, which had a band and a drill team; mothers in the Ladies of St. Ann Society; fathers in the Holy Name Society and St. Vincent de Paul's organization, which took care of the parish needy. Membership rules in these organizations were strict, and failure to observe them meant expulsion, which no one risked. Parish priests directed each of these groups. Talented singers belonged to the sodality choirs, also to the "mixed" choir that sang at High Mass on Sundays.

Sunday was also the day for family reunions. Members alternated in entertaining for the noon meal. In the afternoon if there were daughters of marriageable age, young men came calling--not alone, but in groups of as many as there were daughters in the household. When a young man became "serious" over one of the daughters, he was allowed to call Sunday evening and later on the "good" nights, Tuesday and Thursday, and a wedding was sure to follow. This was still the Victorian era. Girls and boys of marriageable age were always chaperoned or risked being "talked about". That would reflect not only on the girl, but on her sisters, seriously affecting their chances of marrying well. Therefore, courtships were conducted surrounded by the family.

WEDDINGS, CHRISTENINGS

In the early days French-Canadians married mostly among their own people. Prior to the establishment of a five-day work week, weddings invariably took place on Monday morning with prenuptial reception the night before. The wedding usually took place in early morning because even as late as the 1930's, the wedding trip was to Canada, often to the home of some relative. Departure had to fit the schedule of the Grand Trunk Railway.

Girls married young and were uninformed about sex. It would have been considered unseemly otherwise. A wife was expected to become pregnant during her first year of marriage and frequently throughout her fertile years, or she was considered sickly. Intercourse was referred to as a "duty", and a wife practically went out of circulation, except within the confines of her home and

family, until the children were brought up. She never went out on the street when her pregnancy became apparent, which usually occurred at 15 or 18 month intervals.

A christening was a big event, one for which the father wore his silk hat and all participants rode in style to church. Etiquette again ruled certain decisions, such as the choice of godparents, the woman who would carry the child, "la porteuse" she was called, and the choice of given names for the child. Traditionally each boy was first named Joseph and each girl Marie. Other given names were always those of saints, and the godparents had first choice. The paternal grandparents were godparents if the child was a boy; vice versa, if a girl was the first born.

DEATHS, MOURNINGS

When tragedy struck a home, neighbors were quick to bring aid and comfort, not waiting to be asked. One frequently hears of a child who "grew up" in this home or that after his parents died. Even bachelors have "brought up" several children of deceased parents. No greater tragedy could occur than that of having to place children in an orphanage, even though these institutions were under the kindly and charitable direction of dedicated nuns. There were two separate orphanages in Lewiston for many years, one for girls and one for boys, but most of the children were state wards. Some private cases were orphaned of one parent, occasionally both, and there were also day pupils who returned to their parents' home each night.

A death in the family was usually a three-day event for the early residents. Survivors absented themselves from work and spent the time between the death and the funeral at the home of the bereaved. Day and night vigils were held, relatives and friends relieving each other, except on the last night when only relatives remained and possibly a close friend or two to help serve the midnight luncheon.

Everyone dressed in black, and when private cars were used in the funeral cortege, only black or dark-colored cars were acceptable. When parents died, the period of mourning continued for two years, the women veiling their faces whenever they went out. For brother or sister, the mourning period was cut to a year, and at the mid-point, in summer especially, it was acceptable to wear white, lavender, or gray.

Young people were not allowed to marry during periods of mourning, during Lent, or in Advent. Widowers and widows who remarried had such ceremonies performed discreetly, usually at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

LIFE AT HOME

Normally the French led a joyous life. Any family reunion was highlighted by entertainment provided by its members. Everyone was expected to do something for entertainment; one sang, played a musical instrument, or "declaimed", according to the fashion of the day. It was a natural event, everyone seemed to agree, and one took no pride in one's presentation with the words "excusez la" (excuse it).

Children reluctant to practice a musical lesson were shamed into renewed ardor by the parent saying, "And what will you do when company comes? Just sit there unable to do any thing?" As economic conditions improved, a piano was added to the home furnishings and every child "took lessons". Play time was curtailed by "having to practice". Recitals were annual affairs attended by parents and family friends. Each fall one-inch advertisements by local music teachers easily filled two columns of our local newspapers.

Everyone lived in a "block", probably so-called because of their shape. It took some adjustment for families formerly accustomed to living in private homes, but it was a way of life one had to get accustomed to in this city. These blocks usually had at least four stories, some five, and a central hallway separated each rent. One family lived on each side of the corridor. In the summer when doors and windows were open for ventilation, one became aware of everything that went on, not only across the hall, but above and below, and even across the street.

Children played with other children living in the same block, always within sight and sound of their parents. Quarrels must have been frequent with enough children in each block to easily fill a classroom, but parents kept aloof from these quarrels and children learned that they had to keep peace with playmates or stay indoors.

Such close living must have caused friction among adults too, but the most frequent complaint that has come down through the years was about a tenant who failed to keep her portion of the hall and stairway sufficiently clean. Like the children adults had their reasons to keep peace. In the evenings families congregated around the kitchen table. Adults entertained themselves with conversation and card playing. The latter was the great family pastime along with checkers, especially among the men. Both men and women played whist.

The most enjoyable part of the day for the children was early evening, when they were allowed to gather around a father or neighbor who excelled in the telling of tales-"contes." These were stories handed down through generations or made up by the story teller. The "contes" seem generally to have been of a particular genre, the terrifying tale that made a child shudder with fear and relish the proximity of his companions as all listened wide-eyed to the oft--repeated stories. These "contes" have been collected and recorded by Luc Lacourciere, noted French-Canadian folklorist, and are preserved at Laval University in Quebec.

After the children had gone to bed and were snug in winter under heavy homemade blankets - "catalognes", it was time for the adults to socialize with talk and card games. Neighbors came in from across the hall, upstairs and down, all from the same block. Card games were spirited affairs, complete with running commentary, good-humored banter, much laughter, and considerable slapping of cards on the table when there was an especially clever play. They were naturally noisy people. If conversation or fun quieted down at any reunion, someone was sure to urge a lift by saying something like, "Let's wake up, this is no funeral."

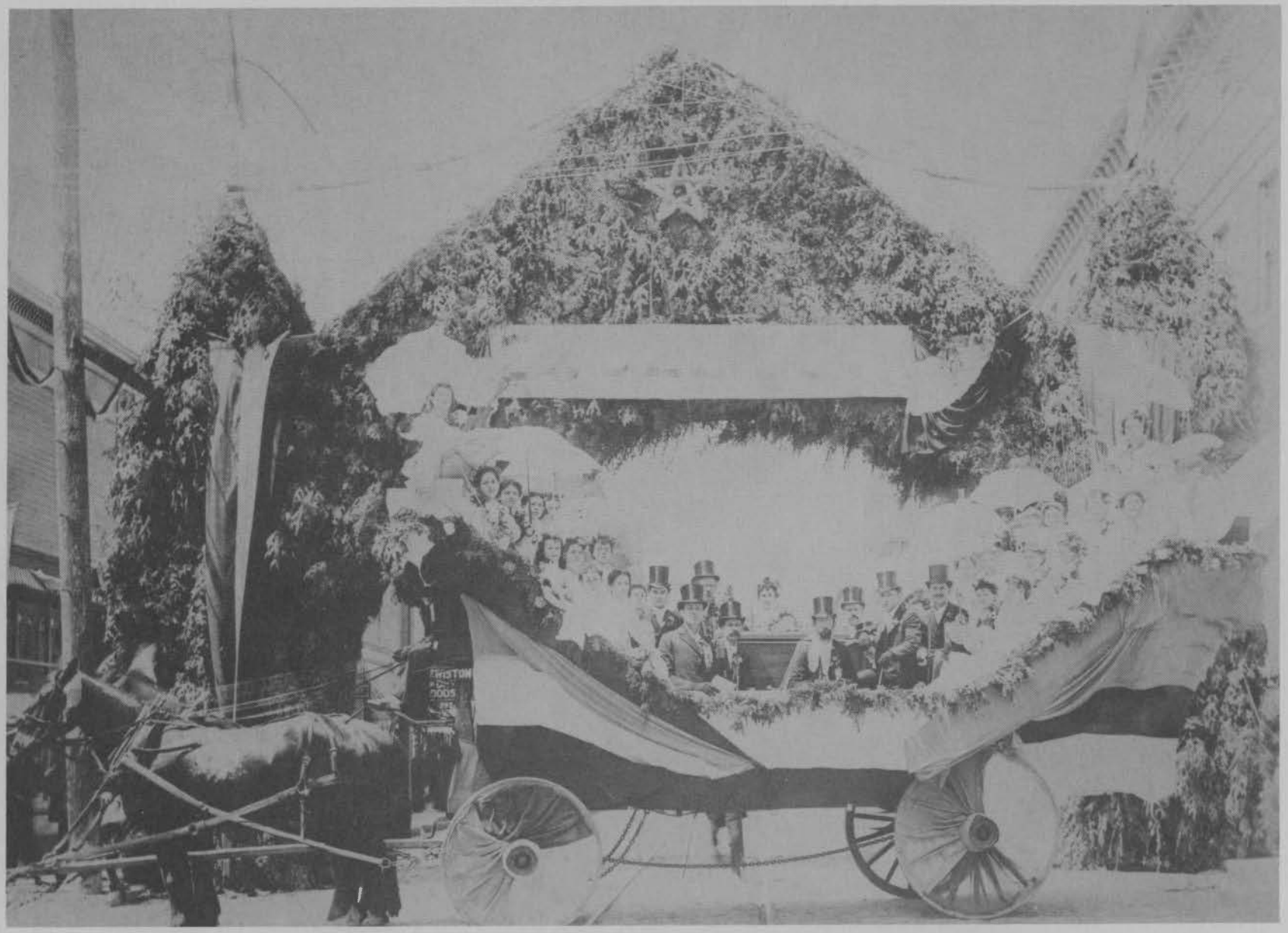
In addition to family reunions, which were frequent, these people observed all occasions that helped to break the daily routine. On church holy days businessmen and professionals closed their stores and offices. Christmas was a religious day, and New Year's Day was the festive, gift-giving occasion.

The ancient custom of obtaining the blessing of the eldest male of the family during the New Year's Day festivities was generally honored. This custom kept families together and also served to end any family quarrel that might have arisen during the year. Friends and relatives were expected to make home calls at least within the 30 days after New Year's. Failure to do so was recognized as a termination of the friendship or the continuation of a quarrel.

So attached were the early residents to the observance of New Year's Day that they would forsake work to the despair of mill owners. Finally, Franco-Americans won over the State Legislature, and New Year's Day became a legal holiday in Maine. Since then the Franco-Americans have adopted Christmas as both a religious and social holiday, but families and friends still honor the New Year's Day period as the time for reunions.

Let us not forget the long-established practice of attending Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve when church choirs sought to outdo each other in the excellence of their music. Stringed and brass instruments were added to the usual organ accompaniment until complaints began to be heard that this was getting to be more theatrical than religious. After the service families gathered for the traditional "reveillon," probably so named because it served to keep folks awake. The feature of the meal was always the "tourtiere," a pork meat pie that was a standby of early French-Canadian menus. Current tastes in food have become Americanized like many other things among the descendants of the early residents.

The one feast day that brought the entire French community together was St. John's Day, June 24th, when traditionally in France and Canada those of French descent honor their patron saint by reviewing their past glories and grandeur and pledge themselves to greater achievements. In Lewiston- Auburn the annual celebration was always held on the Sunday nearest the 24th of June. Arches were built across the streets, floats were built and decorated in the French colors, which, fortunately, are the same as those of the United States, bands played, choirs sang, and the whole festivities concluded with a well-attended banquet with noted speakers "to grace the occasion."



Typical of St. John's Day celebrations by early French - Canadian residents of Lewiston - Auburn is this decorated float photographed about 1895 - 6 under an arch constructed for the occasion at the corner of Lisbon and Chestnut streets, Lewiston. Occupants of this float were members of the S. S. Peter and Paul mixed choir, and they sang traditional French airs during the parade under the leadership of Henri F. Roy, parish organist, shown at right center - front, wearing goatee. At the console is his first wife, the former Emilie Couturier. Note the silk hats and walking sticks the men sported, and the parasols the women used to shield themselves from the sun.

CULTURAL LIFE

By 1872 the French Canadians were sufficiently numerous to originate their first mutual society, Americans would call it a lodge, where life insurance was a major inducement. This first organization was called "Institut Jacques Cartier," and it became the center of cultural activities for these residents. Several years later the lodge built a large tenement house, which still stands next to City Building, where members had priority in renting. It now owns a three-story brick building at Lisbon and Chestnut Streets, which serves as headquarters for various social activities and for rental revenue.

Lodge meetings always generated entertainment by talented members. Banquets brought out their best speakers. The people were fascinated by a "beau parleur" (skilled orator) and listened at length with thorough enjoyment over every well-turned phrase and sentence.

Until comparatively recent years the French segment of our city provided its own entertainment. It was necessary because everything else was in English. One never masters another language as thoroughly as the mother-tongue, which explains why programs in French still appeal to local residents of that lineage.

To raise funds for the building of churches and schools the early residents sponsored annual bazaars that filled City Building Auditorium nightly for a week. A feature attraction was the annual ballet choreographed by a talented nun from Switzerland, who had arrived here with an early contingent of the Dominican nuns. From 1906 to 1908 she created these ballets, trained school children for months, costumed them with contributions from parents and non-performing school children, and introduced ballet in the classic dance form to this community long before its advent elsewhere in the country.

Only an extended, documented account can give proper credit to all the theatrical and musical productions these people contributed to the cultural life of the community, but, unfortunately, they were enjoyed only by their own people. They maintained stock companies for years with a large number of amateur actors, whose productions were of sufficient merit to bring them en-

gagements to tour other French-speaking communities of our state, where they always performed before capacity audiences.

For their musical productions they formed orchestras and even a symphony. They presented operas annually for several years, also an annual oratorio until the death of their popular director, Alphonse W. Cote. Church choirs, including the one he directed, were so noted for their artistry that it made church attendance as enjoyable as a concert. The French people also maintained an adult and a boys' band, the latter at a time when such an undertaking was unheard of. This boys' band, called St. Cecilia's, directed by the Dominican Lay Brother Aymon, annually toured in Canada. This band and St. Dominic's Band played regularly for Lewiston City Park concerts, alternating with other local bands.

The dramatic and musical presentations sponsored in those early days were from the traditional, classical French repertoire until this was nearly exhausted. During the 1930's France sent its Porte St. Martin theatrical company to this country, and Lewiston was included in the itinerary. The plays presented were a modern one to provide occasion for the wearing of fashionable clothes, "Le maitre de forges" and "Cyrano de Bergerac."

Francois Lacombe of Lewiston wearing the member uniform of Institut Jacques Cartier, photographed in 1895.

When this writer interviewed the players during their stay here, they expressed surprise that "Le maitre" had demonstrated the least appeal for local audiences, whereas, in France, it always brought out "the baker, the candlestick maker, etc." to fill the house. It was explained to them that possibly too many in the community had either played in a production of that old theatrical warhorse or had attended so many performances of it, that the newer or the classic had more appeal.

J. B. Couture, a leader in local theatrical and musical productions, seeking something new for local production, translated Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pinafore" into French; and it was presented here several times with various casts and directors. He titled it "L'Amour a bord." Its last local performance was in 1939.

It was mostly through the musical enterprises such as the presentation of operas and oratorios, and curiosity over a French "Pinafore", that other local Americans became attracted to the French-speaking residents in their midst. They attended some of their performances, music being understood by all, and, little by little, acquaintances developed among the various ethnic groups, until we all live harmoniously.

Joseph Marcotte of Lewiston wearing the member uniform of St. Dominic's Association in 1896.

St. Cecilia Band photographed for the cover of a march composed and copyrighted in 1907 by the late Alphonse W. Cote of Auburn. Bottom row, left to right: Alphonse Jacques, Albert Barriault, Fernand Despins, Willie Belanger who is holding cymbals; J. B. Nadeau Jr. with drums; Amedee Morel, Adrien Fournier and John Plourde. Middle row, same order: Antonio Cailler, Armand Poliquin, Charles Gagne, Lucien Lebel, E. N. Giguere, who was the drum - major; Brother Aymon, the founder and director; Herve Jacques, Wilfrid Sirois, Origene Poliquin and Dominique Fortier. Top row: Charles Dube, Victor Vaillancourt, Osias Gagnon, Denis Giguere, Josephat (he later spelled it Josafa) Morin, Albert Christman, Elmo Tremblay, Willie Dauphin and Eugene Bazinet. These boys, and later members, went on to professional musical activities in sizeable numbers. Josafa Morin went to Belgium to study the violin, taught that instrument in Lewiston several years, and directed or was concert - master for local symphonies and orchestras; Lucien Lebel and his brother Edmond both played with professional dance bands and theatrical orchestras while still attending local schools, and Almo A. Roussin wrote an illustrated booklet of instructions on the playing of the saxophone which was published by the Boston Music Co. when he was a student in Boston. Some of these band members financed their college studies with their music; one reporting that he even sent money home - reversing the usual custom. Young J. B. Nadeau made a career of playing with circus bands. Others became prominent here as business men; Despins became mayor of the city, judge of the municipal court and clerk of the county probate court; Lucien Lebel was Lewiston city clerk many years until his retirement; the drum - major became Dr. Giguere; and Willie Dauphin became a priest.

THEIR NEWSPAPER, POLITICS

Le Messager, a newspaper printed in French, was established by these people in 1880, and it lasted until 1966. It was published weekly, tri-weekly, and daily at different times, and served to keep French-speaking residents united. Its columns always featured a "feuilleton" or serial story usually of romantic import that captivated the women of that day as much as today's television soap operas. More significantly Le Messager reported French-Canadian activities in the community and promoted patronage of many worthwhile projects, making its disappearance felt to the present day whenever an all-French undertaking is being organized. Above all Le Messager promoted education for its people. It exhorted them to become naturalized American citizens and to participate in the political life of the city.

In the same year that Le Messager was founded, Emile Lefebvre was serving as councillor of Lewiston's ward six, where the majority of French-Canadians then lived. In 1884 Dr. Louis J. Martel was elected to represent his fellow citizens in the Maine Legislature, and in 1891-2 he was chairman of Lewiston's Board of Aldermen. In 1887 P. X. Angers, an attorney, was the first Franco--American to serve as alderman, and in 1890 F. X. Belleau, another attorney, was the first City Clerk from that ethnic group. Three years later Belleau was named by President Grover Cleveland to represent the United States at the Canadian Consulate located at Trois Rivieres, Quebec.

In 1893, Dr. Martel was the first Franco-American to become a candidate for the Mayor of Lewiston and was narrowly defeated by Seth Chandler. Since 1914 when Franco-Americans succeeded in electing a mayor, members of this group have held the majority of local municipal offices, as well as many at the county and state level.

AMERICANS, FINALLY

By now the French have obtained Franco-American status, which indicates they are Americans of French descent. There was a long period when so-called hyphenated Americanism was unpopular, and it led some to stop speaking the language. The French, as they are still called by others and even by themselves, couldn't and still can't understand why one can be less of an American if one retains pride and affection for a mother-country, especially one that has age-old world repute as a leader in civilization and culture. They think it gives them added prestige, and they continue to foster their language and customs among their progeny.

What these people now consider unfortunate, if not tragic, is that younger members of their group have forsaken the language of their forebears, speaking only English and teaching that language to their children. This makes it necessary to teach them in English and to have religious services in that language This factor also contributes to the diminishing number of parochial schools.

The Franco-Americans weren't here to serve in earlier wars, but as early as the Spanish- American conflict they enlisted to serve with the military forces of this country. They have done so in increasing numbers through every succeeding military engagement in appreciation and gratitude for the many blessings accorded them since coming here. Let no-one question their sincerity in their love for this country.

LITTLE CANADA AND VICINITY
A BUILDING SURVEY

by

MR. JAMES S. LEAMON, text

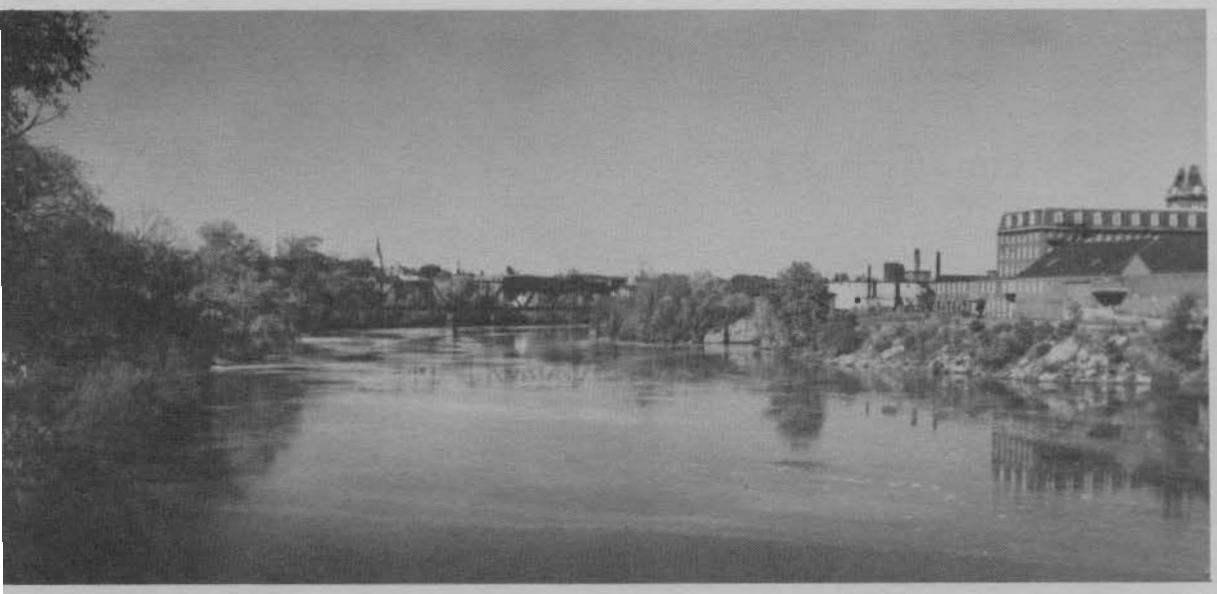
MR. GRIDLEY BARROWS, photography

CANAL
STREET
CHESTNUT
LINCOLN
STREET
BEECH
STREET
OXFORD
STREET
CEDAR
RIVER STREET
GTRR
SOUTH BRIDGE
MAINE
STREET
STREET
LINCOLN DRIVE
LOCUST
CENTRAL
Tanks
Tanks
LEWISTON'S
LITTLE CANADA
AND VICINITY
SCALE: 1"= 200'

THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER

Below the Lewiston Falls and around the bend the Androscoggin River broadens out as the Little Androscoggin flows in from the left or Auburn side. On the opposite bank Lewiston's first settler, Paul Hildreth, built his cabin in 1770 and operated the first ferry. Since the 1850's the area has been the location for an increasing number of textile mills that utilize the water power from the Falls. The Continental Mill, dominating the scene to the right of the picture, occupies the site where Hildreth's cabin once stood.

The expanding employment opportunities attracted many French-speaking immigrants from Canada who settled near the mills. They gave a special character to the section of the city where they lived, called to this day "Little Canada".



Lewiston via the Grand Trunk Railroad

GRAND TRUNK RAILROAD STATION

After 1874 most French-Canadian immigrants to Lewiston arrived by means of the Grand Trunk or Canadian National Railway. Originally the line ran from Montreal to Portland, by-passing Lewiston and Auburn. However, the Twin Cities built their own railroad to intersect with the Grand Trunk at Lewiston Junction and leased the entire operation to the Grand Trunk for ninety-nine years. In this fashion the cities secured direct connections with Canada and the West.

Travellers taking this route to Lewiston could glimpse the city framed by the iron bridge over the Androscoggin river. Appropriately enough the towers of Lewiston's City Hall and of the Bates Mill dominate the skyline. At the end of the line is the Grand Trunk Railway Station through which came thousands of Lewiston's French-speaking inhabitants.

The station is important for more than its historic and nostalgic value. It represents a type of architecture fast disappearing as railroad stations everywhere lose their utility and fall victim to decay or "progress." Built in 1885 this building is a fine example of "stick-style" architecture. Its outstanding characteristics are the high-peaked roof, the open lattice decorative work at the peak, and the long overhanging eaves. The open brackets under the eaves not only support the overhang, but offer a pleasing rhythmic decoration.

No longer does the station serve its original purpose. Its present occupant is the Child and Family Mental Health Services, which uses the building as a clinic.

THE CANAL

The immigrants to Lewiston could scarcely avoid noticing the canal system which transferred the power generated by the river's falls to the city's textile mills. Although a group of local businessmen had drawn up plans for an industrial canal as early as 1836, construction did not begin until 1850. By that time Boston capitalists, led by Benjamin E. Bates, Thomas J. Hill, and others, were directing Lewiston's economic development through the Lewiston Water Power Company. This organization owned the power rights and most of the land in what is now downtown Lewiston.

Captain Albert H. Kelsey, agent for the Company, located and supervised the building of the canal as well as most of the mills that lined it. Lewiston's first wave of foreign immigrants, the Irish, provided the labor. Captain Kelsey recalled many years later that the task of levelling and cutting through solid ledge made construction of the canal a tedious job. "In front of Bates Mill there was a ledgy elevation some twenty feet above the present level. That had to be cleared away. I remember that we had a mighty blast there. I had the men put 19 casks of powder into the ledge and we sent her off with one crack."

Two parallel canals, the "main" and the "lower" and several cross canals comprise the entire system. The main canal extends for three-quarters of a mile. The channel is fourteen feet deep and sixty-two feet wide at the top, narrowing to fifty-eight feet at the bottom. Locks of granite at the head of the main canal contain gates to regulate the flow of water. Early photographs indicate that the canal was once a visual as well as an economic asset to the city. Stately trees grew along the edge and their branches arched above, giving shade and even a charm to Lewiston's industrial center.

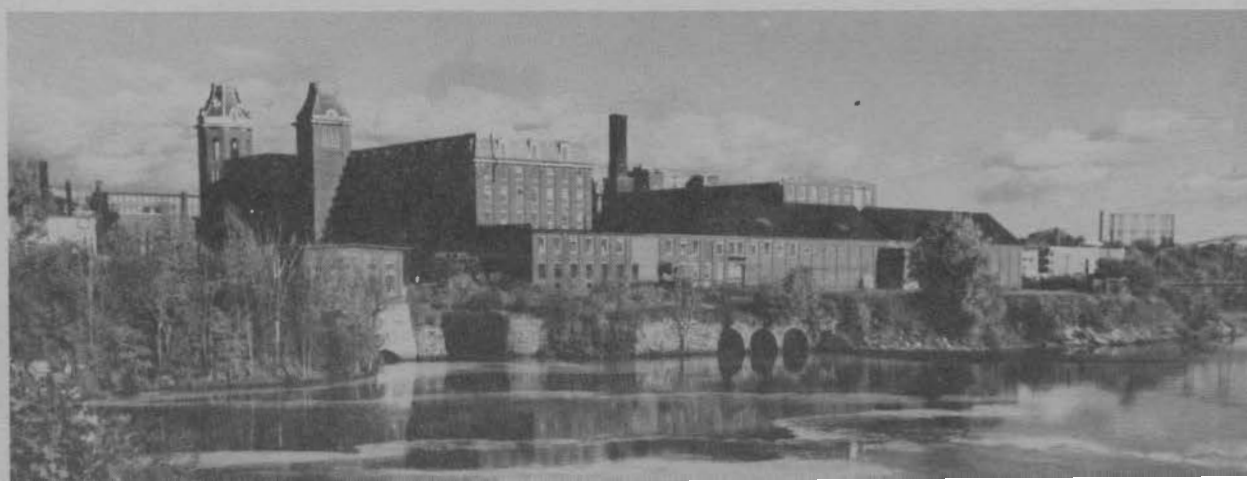
THE CONTINENTAL MILL

Lewiston's cotton textile mills, such as the Continental shown here, long dominated the city's life. Their combined demands for labor were what drew so many people to Lewiston in the first place. "Little Canada" exists literally in the shadow of the Continental which looms up along the river bank. As early as 1858 a smaller structure, the Porter Mill, occupied this site. French-speaking residents called it "the Poteur." In 1866 the Continental Company purchased the existing plant and expanded it. By 1895 the Continental alone employed 1200 persons. This helps to explain the existence of Little Canada, as mill employees sought housing close to their place of employment. From here they had easy access to the city's other textile mills, such as the Bates, Hill, and the Androscoggin.

Although the mills were erected with great speed and for highly practical reasons, the builders nevertheless spent considerable time, effort, and money to make them more than mere piles of brick and masonry to house machinery. Late nineteenth century mills often possess an architectural style particularly well adapted to large buildings. Inspiration for this style came from two different historical eras, the period of Emperor Napoleon III, thus the term French Imperial style, and the Italian Renaissance.

The Continental Mill embodies these two architectural influences. The French Imperial is most evident in the mill's mansard roof with its sharp pitch on all sides and with dormers projecting along the entire length. Even the towers have their own very graceful French Imperial tops, each uniquely different from the other. The remainder of the building below the roof represents the Italian Renaissance influence. This is best revealed in the heavy arches of the octagonal tower. The grouped arched windows high up in the square tower give it an almost Tuscan quality. Together the Italian and French Imperial themes convey a sense of power and grandeur notably lacking in modern factory buildings.

Today Lewiston's textile mills can no longer live up to their architectural style. With the exception of the Bates Company the cotton establishments have shut down or moved away. They have left their vast buildings to small independent operations as crumbling monuments to a great past.



MILL BLOCKS

Lewiston grew very rapidly during the last half of the nineteenth century. In 1850 it had a population just under 5,000. Ten years later the number had swelled to about 7,500, and by the turn of the century it was well over 23,000. To accommodate the rapid influx of people attracted by Lewiston's employment opportunities, mill owners constructed special tenements called mill blocks. Originally they were designed to shelter the Yankee farm girls who came from the surrounding countryside to provide Lewiston's mills with their earliest labor force. Each mill block was under the strict supervision of a director who kept a careful eye on the moral and physical condition of the tenants.

These few buildings are all that are left of the many substantial mill blocks that once lined Oxford Street. The dead elm is another mute reminder of a time when shade trees bordered both street and canal. The brick buildings and the trees gave a dignity and a character to the neighborhood that has since disappeared.

These mill blocks were constructed in 1865 in an architectural style that is a transition from the Greek Revival to the Italian Renaissance. The very plain almost severe treatment of the windows and doors indicate the Greek Revival features. The recessed doorways with their brick pilasters supporting granite lintels are very simple, and only the lintels provide ornamentation around the windows. The entire building is very restrained and consciously balanced. The brick work along the facade, corners, and sides emphasizes this sense of proportion, harmony, and simplicity. On the other hand the flat roof and over-hanging eaves with their supporting brackets illustrate the Italian influence. The cupola and cross are later additions, indicating the religious and educational functions that these buildings serve today.

Oxford Mill Blocks

Number 156 Lincoln Street

Corner of Chestnut and Lincoln streets

PRIVATE BLOCKS

Lewiston's population quickly outstripped the mill blocks, and private housing arose to meet the need. Although designed to provide economical living for the largest number of people, the blocks or tenements exhibit a wide variety of different architectural styles. The years when these styles were popular offer a rough means by which to estimate the date of construction. However, the continued popularity of some building styles means there is considerable overlapping.

The three story wooden block at 156 Lincoln Street is a case in point. It was built in 1875 and thereby reveals the persistence of a style popular in the 1850's and 1860's. It furthermore demonstrates that private builders could express successfully in an economical wooden building the same combination of Greek Revival and Italian forms that the mill owners did in their more expensive brick structures. In this block only the center windows possess their original trim, but these and the doorway exhibit the same restrained ornamentation as in the mill blocks. Over all the severely regular arrangement of the door and windows provide a similar note of harmony and order. The flat roof, eaves, and brackets reflect the Italian elements in this style that enjoyed a long popularity.

Building styles were in process of change. The block on the corner of Chestnut and Lincoln Streets, built in 1890, illustrates a reaction to the rationality

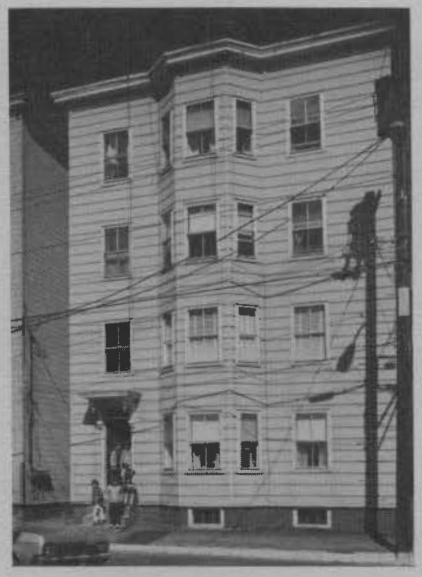
Number 128
Oxford street

and restraint of the Greek Revival and Italian. This newer style, called Queen Anne, sought a much more dynamic impact by making use of medieval towers, sharply sloping roofs, and contrasting exterior surfaces. This particular building has a wide variety of surface treatments. The regularity of the decoration under the eaves contrasts with the irregular and the semi-circular shingles and with the clapboards. The breaks in the facade between the first and second and the third and fourth stories, combined with the semi-circular shingles along the edge of the break, create an impression like that of a knight's armor. This suits well the medieval quality of the tower with its tall conical top.

By the turn of the century there had occured another shift in style to Colonial Revival. 100 Lincoln Street, built in 1904, shows this in the triangular pediment and in the long fluted pilasters on the facade, as well as in the double windows between the pilasters. However, the builders did not hesitate to combine the Colonial Revival with other more modern features, such as the prominent tiered bay windows on either side of the building which at this time were widely popular. In addition to its architectural styling this particular building is of interest in that it occupies the site of Saint John's Chapel, Lewiston's first Catholic Church.

In contrast to the foregoing buildings with their distinctive styles are those blocks which have been renovated by the addition of modern siding. While this may up-grade a building's appearance to a certain extent, it also deprives it of its unique character by hiding the architectural details. Buildings such as those at 48 River Street and 128 Oxford Street now possess only the hoods over the doorways as a testimony to their architectural individuality.

Number 48 River street



Number 100 Lincoln Street

Little Canada

Despite modern renovations the area bounded by Lincoln, Cedar, River, and Oxford Streets still has a unique character. Today almost one thousand persons live in this neighborhood that covers about nine and a half acres. It is the historical center of Lewiston's French-speaking population, thus the nickname "Little Canada". Many of the residents are descended from Lewiston's earliest French-Canadian settlers. Some of the first residents of the Little Canada section include: Jean Jacques, Noel Gravel, Etienne Langelier, Ulric Huard, Elie Roy, Thomas Croteau, Alfred Boies, Alfred Tancrel, Hubert Blouin, Thomas Paradis, Louis Bosse, George Croteau, Arsene Lavoie, Gilbert Rivard, Jean Baptiste Lamontagne.

Few would claim that the individual buildings are beautiful, but collectively they create an "old world" atmosphere that is markedly different from the rest of Lewiston, which is laid out on a regular grid-like pattern. In Little Canada narrow streets and alleys twist between the blocks that seem all the higher since they are so close to one another and to the street itself.

Maps of the city prior to the 1870's show no buildings in this area because the Franklin Company, successor to the Lewiston Water Power Company, had it reserved for mill sites. However, in the following decades the Company, possibly feeling it had sufficient investment in mills and canals, sold the land to those who made the most out of every foot. When viewed from across the river, the numerous tiered porches create rhythmic contrasts of light and shadow. Over all soars the spire of Saint Mary's Church.

THE DOMINICAN BUILDING

The Dominican Block on the corner of Chestnut and Lincoln Streets was the center around which swirled much of Lewiston's Franco-American life. The Reverend Louis Alexandre Mothon, first Dominican priest of Saint Peter's, was deeply aware of the French community's need for a school where children could obtain religion as well as secular instruction, in French as well as in English. The Dominican Block was the result. It opened its doors to 650 students on January 8, 1883. Eight Sisters of Charity, or Gray Nuns, had charge of instruction until the Ladies of Sion arrived in 1892 to assume this task.

From the very start, however, the Dominican Building was more than a school. It served as a place of worship and as a social center as well. Long-time residents of the Little Canada and Lincoln Street areas still recall attending Mass there. It not only relieved them of the long uphill walk to Saint Peter's on Bartlett Street, but helped to lessen crowded conditions in that church, the only one serving the French-speaking population in the area.

The building was also important as a place where the Franco-American community could enjoy its plays and operas. Those same residents who recall the church services in the Dominican Building also describe the active social life

The Dominican Block

that took place there. The English language newspaper referred to the Dominican Building as the social and political nerve center of the French Catholic population, an unofficial city hall.

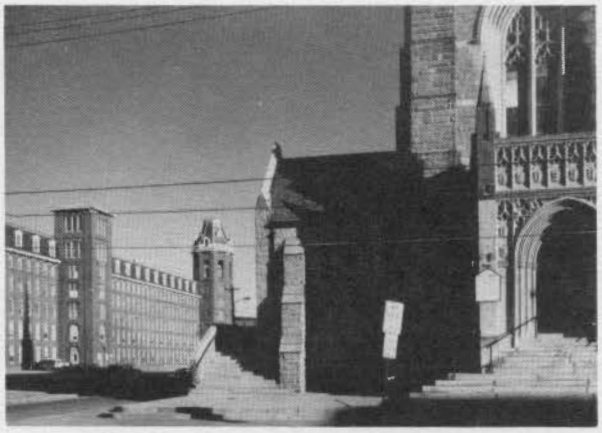
The Dominicans spared no expense when they planned the building. They hired George M. Coombs, one of Lewiston's best architects, to design it. The architectural firm Coombs founded is still in existence as Alonzo J. Harriman Associates in Auburn. The Dominican Building is an imposing five-story brick and granite structure in the architectural style called Queen Anne. It was a highly popular type of building; a similar structure stands on Chestnut Street, and Coombs designed a smaller version of the Dominican Building in the town of Farmington. Some of the characteristics of this style are the high, stepped gable front and its "busy" appearance with turrets, pilasters, indents, and classical pediments atop arches. One particularly interesting feature is the cast iron decorative columns along the front of the ground floor.

Today the building no longer serves its original function. Years ago the Dominicans sold the building to private owners who removed the religious symbols and converted the structure to commercial purposes.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH

On the corner of Oxford and Cedar Streets directly across from the Continental Mill stands Saint Mary's Church. Originally Saint Peter and Paul's on Bartlett Street served all the French-speaking inhabitants of Lewiston and Auburn. By the turn of the century, however, a single parish could no longer accommodate so large a number of parishioners. In 1907 eccesiastical authorities approved the creation of a new parish, Saint Mary's, in the area between Canal Street and the Androscoggin River. Here resided a significant portion of Lewiston's Franco-American population. The first parish census numbered 825 families, which included 4,230 individuals and over 1200 children.

Original plans had called for the church to be built on the corner of Chestnut and Lincoln Streets, but land prices there were exorbitant. Subsequently the Continental Company agreed to sell not only the land for the church, but later on the two adjoining mill blocks on Oxford Street for use as a rectory, school, and convent. A Boston firm, Chickering and O'Connell, later re-named O'Connell and O'Connell, designed the new church. Lemieux and Chevalier of Lewiston did the construction. Work commenced in August of 1907, and by the end of the year the roofed basement or crypt was able to accommodate 840 people and was equipped with an organ costing $2,000. Prior to that time members of the new parish had to hear Mass in the Dominican Building or in Lewiston's City Hall. The upper building was finally completed in 1928 by Louis Malo and Sons of Lewiston.

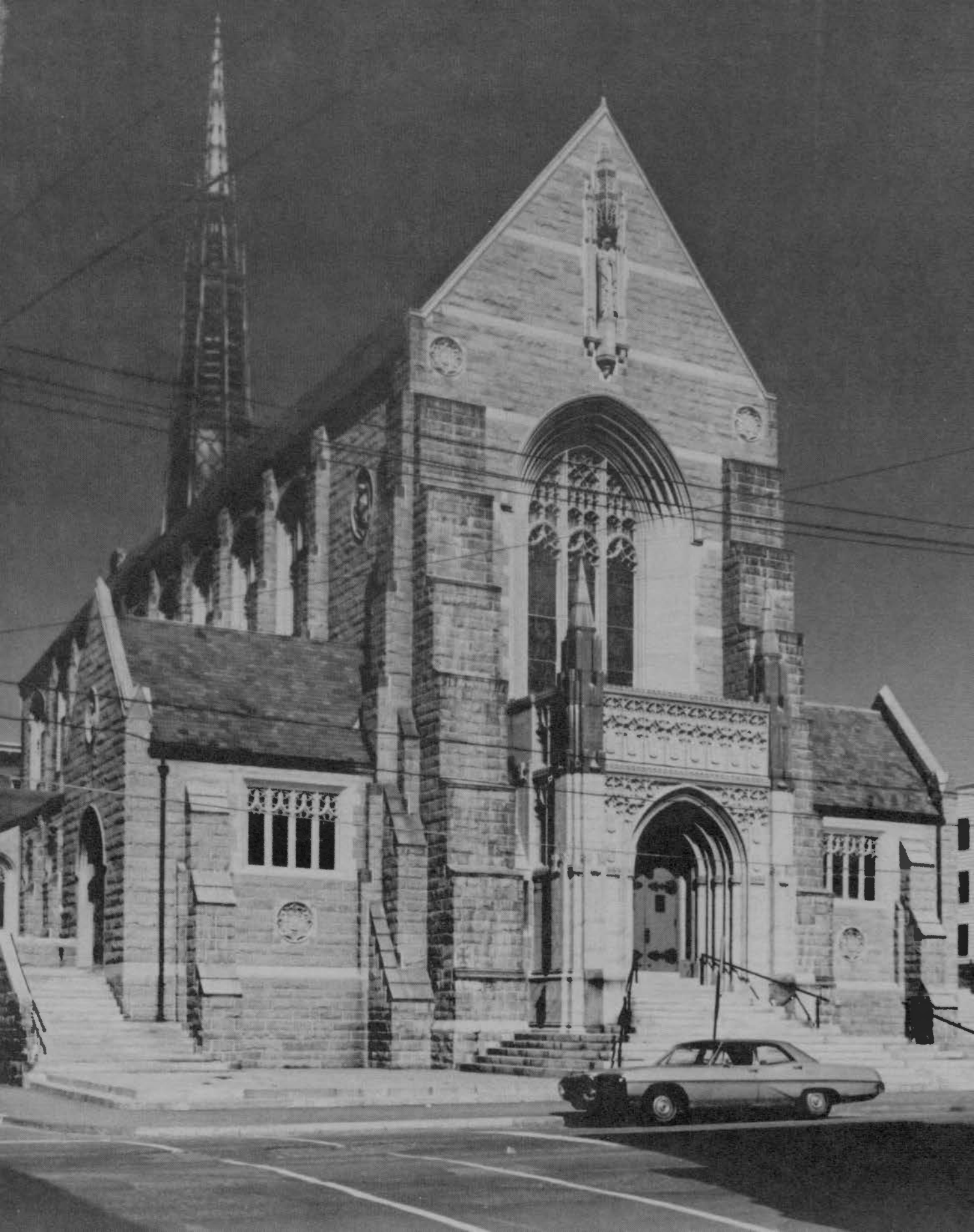


St. Mary's Church

Unfortunately Saint Mary's location in a congested section of the city tends to obscure what the Lewiston Evening Journal called "one of the finest pieces of architecture in the city." That was in 1928, and the claim is still valid today. The church is constructed of Maine granite, and like Saint Peter and Paul's on Bartlett Street it is of Gothic design. However, unlike the mother church Saint Mary's is far less flamboyant. It possesses, nonetheless, the same sense of soaring height achieved by the pointed arches at the doorway and repeated in the lovely window that dominates the facade. The horizontal quality of the front portico is successfully offset by the small pinnacles at the corners. The elongated statue of the Virgin in the niche high up in the facade and the graceful spire continue the vertical emphasis in this highly impressive structure.

In planning Saint Mary's Church the architects deliberately sought to discover a design that would have special meaning to the Franco-American parishioners, many of whose ancestors had come to Canada from Normandy. The building therefore has several features that are not merely Gothic, but Norman Gothic in style. For instance, in Saint Mary's the apse, that portion of the church usually containing the altar, is not round as in most churches, but square in the Norman manner. Another Norman emphasis is the spire, called a "lantern", and its location over the "crossing", the place where the north-south and east-west arms of the church building meet. The original purpose of the lantern was to admit light into the sanctuary, which in the smaller Norman churches was always more difficult than in the French cathedrals whose tremendous height did not usually create such a problem.

The proximity of Saint Mary's to the Continental Mill presents an unconsciously symbolic view of the two most powerful forces that once directed the lives of Lewiston's early Franco-Americans. The picture contains irony as well; no sooner was Saint Mary's completed in 1928 than Lewiston's mills began to feel the economic hardships that caused so many to close their doors. Many of the people on which both church and mill depended have also scattered, leaving behind serious problems for the parish. Despite an increase in the original parish boundaries, the number of families has steadily dwindled. As recently as the 1940's it numbered 1400 families; the number now stands at 500. Furthermore, few families today contain the sixteen, eighteen, or even twenty children that were common at the turn of the century. The city has already absorbed Saint Mary's parochial school into the public school system. Saint Mary's Church, like the mill beside it, is an expression of power, grandeur, and optimism, but it faces a very uncertain future.



LOWER LINCOLN STREET

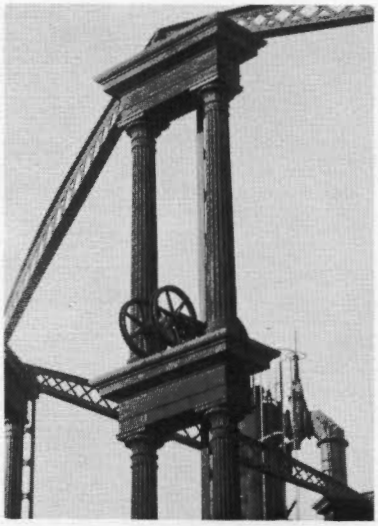
The block-type buildings characteristic of upper Lincoln Street and Little Canada change quite abruptly where Oxford Street joins Lincoln Street. From this point the houses along Lincoln Street are modest story-and-a-half structures. Most of them are much older than they appear and are some of the earliest buildings in the area. The house at number 233 Lincoln was built about 1851 on land that the Franklin Company would lease, but would never sell because of its industrial potential. The result of this leased land tenure is evident in the style of building. The owner of the building did not own the land and was probably reluctant to invest too heavily in his property under those circumstances. The early date of construction and the sharp differences in building style may indicate historically at least that this marked the beginning of Lewiston's Irish section called the "Gas Patch."

THE GAS WORKS

Technically speaking the gas works is beyond the scope of a pamphlet on Lewiston's Franco-Americans. This is an area more closely associated with the city's Irish immigrants who preceded the French to Lewiston by some twenty years. Many of the Irish settled in the neighborhood known then as "the Gas Patch." If it existed today, it would probably be called the Irish ghetto. Near this point the gas company used to discharge its wastes into the river, resulting in a continuous stench that permeated this section of the city.

Two unusual structures still exist at the gas works, reminders of the old Lewiston Gas Light Company that began operation in 1854. The first is the small brick industrial building which, despite its modest appearance, is an excellent example of mid-nineteenth century Greek Revival architecture. It exhibits all the essential features: the peaked roof with gable end to the road, broad areas of the wall relieved by brick pilasters, and simple granite lintels at the doors and windows. With the exception of the garage doors, which may be later additions, the entire building has a classical balance and symmetry.

The unique iron structure that towers nearby carries on this classical motif. The columns and girders were once enclosed within a large rounded brick gas tank with a conical top. Today the tank is dismantled and the structural iron stands empty like the ruins of some ancient temple. It almost appears as though



the mid-nineteenth century builders, embarrassed by iron as a building material, sought to dignify it by casting it in classical forms originally meant for stone.

The graceful, three-tiered, fluted columns are not strictly classical; their leafy capitals evoke a faint Egyptian theme, but nonetheless, they are in keeping with the character of the building beside them. Like the canal, the mills, and mill blocks they illustrate a period when designers and builders successfully combined utility and beauty in their industrial structures. At the gas works it is all the more surprising since the iron work was entirely enclosed and never intended for public display. The modern contrast can be seen in the network of girders and structural steel in the background.

CONCLUSION

A city is not an inert thing. It has a life and a style that are uniquely its own, embodied in its people, their cultures, and their buildings. To the extent that this is realized, appreciated, and preserved, a city either has, or it has not, a meaningful sense of itself. With this self-knowledge a city can take justifiable pride in its origins and achievements. The manner in which a city regards itself helps to shape the attitudes and the responses with which it meets the challenges of the present.

This pamphlet has touched only briefly on one aspect of Lewiston's past. Hopefully, it will enrich those who are Franco-Americans as well as those who are not. More than anything else, however, it is to be desired that this study will awaken in all who read it new interest in their surroundings and pride in their city's past.