

French Traditions: Their History and Continuity in North America

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This year we celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution by examining contemporary folk traditions of France and of French-speaking peoples of North America. The people of Brittany, Normandy, Poitou, Quebec, and the French-speaking communities of New England and Louisiana, North Dakota and Missouri share a common origin and linguistic affinity. Each of these communities has selectively preserved and modified this French cultural heritage in a specific historical and geographical setting despite pressures toward cultural homogenization and political attempts to restrict cultural continuity. Common and transformed elements of expressive culture continue to serve each group's own internally defined needs, including that of self-identification within a larger society. What then connects the expressive culture—the musics, crafts and dance—of these communities with the political events of distant history, and with the ideas that animated those events?

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, proclaimed in the first weeks of the French Republic on August 26, 1789, asserts the inalienable human rights of self-determination and freedom of expression. From the Bretons of Basse-Bretagne to the Michif of North Dakota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, today's traditional music, verbal art and material culture reflect the tensions

between pressures toward conformity with a singular national culture and the rights of individuals and communities to assert their own cultural identities. This Festival of American Folklife program illustrates both the continuity of folk culture in the Francophone communities of France and America and the contemporary importance of human cultural rights for the free expression of communal identity.

Francophone North America was mainly peopled by immigrants from the Atlantic coast of France and their descendants. The evolution of traditional French culture in the new continent was the result of historical forces specific to each area. Desires to maintain self-identity, to assert one's heritage or to distinguish oneself from others altered the lifestyle of each group. Internal social and political transformations, external influences and pressures, and cultural elements borrowed from neighboring communities contributed to the traditions that took shape in the New World.

Cultural diversity is no less important within France. To the outside world France might appear as a cultural unity, but in fact it is a country of considerable cultural diversity. One of the goals of the Revolution—national unification—was not welcome in those regions of France that were not only distant from the events in Paris, but were

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Missouri French speakers have preserved French music and foodways despite being isolated from other Francophone groups for generations. Roy Boyer, fiddle (l.), Gene Hall, fiddle (back), Paul Dennon, guitar and Charlie Pashia. (Photo by Howard W. Marshall, Missouri Cultural Heritage Center)

also culturally and linguistically different. Ethnic minorities within France who spoke languages other than French were subject to the same kind of edicts as those that later forced French speakers in Acadia, Quebec and Louisiana to adopt English, the language of the culture that came to dominate North America politically and economically. This compelled conformity and intolerance of cultural difference led minority communities in France to seek greater opportunity elsewhere—primarily in North America. Conditions in France prior to the Revolution prompted disenfranchised people, especially in the rural areas, to follow earlier mariners and explorers to North America. The French Revolution prompted new migrations among its dissenters (royalists, some of the Catholic clergy, and tenant peasants, the most notable of these counter-revolutionary groups being the *chouans*).

The complexities of these historical movements and their results can be illustrated by the case of French settlement in Missouri.

French settlements in the Mississippi and Missouri Valleys were the result of early expeditions by fur traders coming from the north in search of additional bounty, and explorers from the south in search of mines that had already been signaled by De Soto in the late 16th century. These early French settlements started as forts or missions, and most had French populations too small to produce enough food for their own subsistence. They soon imported slaves from the French colonies in the Caribbean—Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe. Indeed, in many communities the African population outnumbered the French. Thus, many of the oral traditions in these communities reflect very strong African and Creole (Afro-Caribbean) influences. The French in Missouri were cut off from regular contact with other French-speaking communities during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. English speakers started settling in the area in great numbers; political authority and mercantile activity became their domain, and the

French found themselves a disenfranchised minority. As a result of these historical events, French musical traditions are scarce in Missouri and absent in neighboring Illinois. Instead, the Francophone community maintains its distinctiveness largely through its foodways and oral traditions. *Boudin noir* (blood sausage), *beignets* or *beign chawwage* (puff cakes), and *tart à bouillir* (a pie) are all part of the culinary tradition in current day Missouri.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the story is no less complex, though internal migrations were not as frequent in France as they were in North America. Brittany is part of France, and therefore partakes of French culture. While Bretons share a number of cultural elements with other French citizens, they are historically and linguistically more part of the Celtic world, especially those in the region of Basse-Bretagne. Brittany (or "Amorica" as it was known) was not widely evangelized until the 5th or 6th century, after other parts of France had already been Christianized. As a result, oral traditions and belief systems of the area remain quite distinct from those of other parts of France. In some French areas it is topography that leads to isolation, but in the case of Brittany the isolation is cultural in origin. Many Bretons migrated to North America, but they were outnumbered by those who came from other parts of France, and their language did not survive the cultural milieu in Acadia and the other French Canadian areas where they settled. Interestingly, however, Cajun French is testimony to an early migration of Acadians (including Bretons) to South Louisiana and includes nautical terms and other linguistic evidence of Celtic influence.

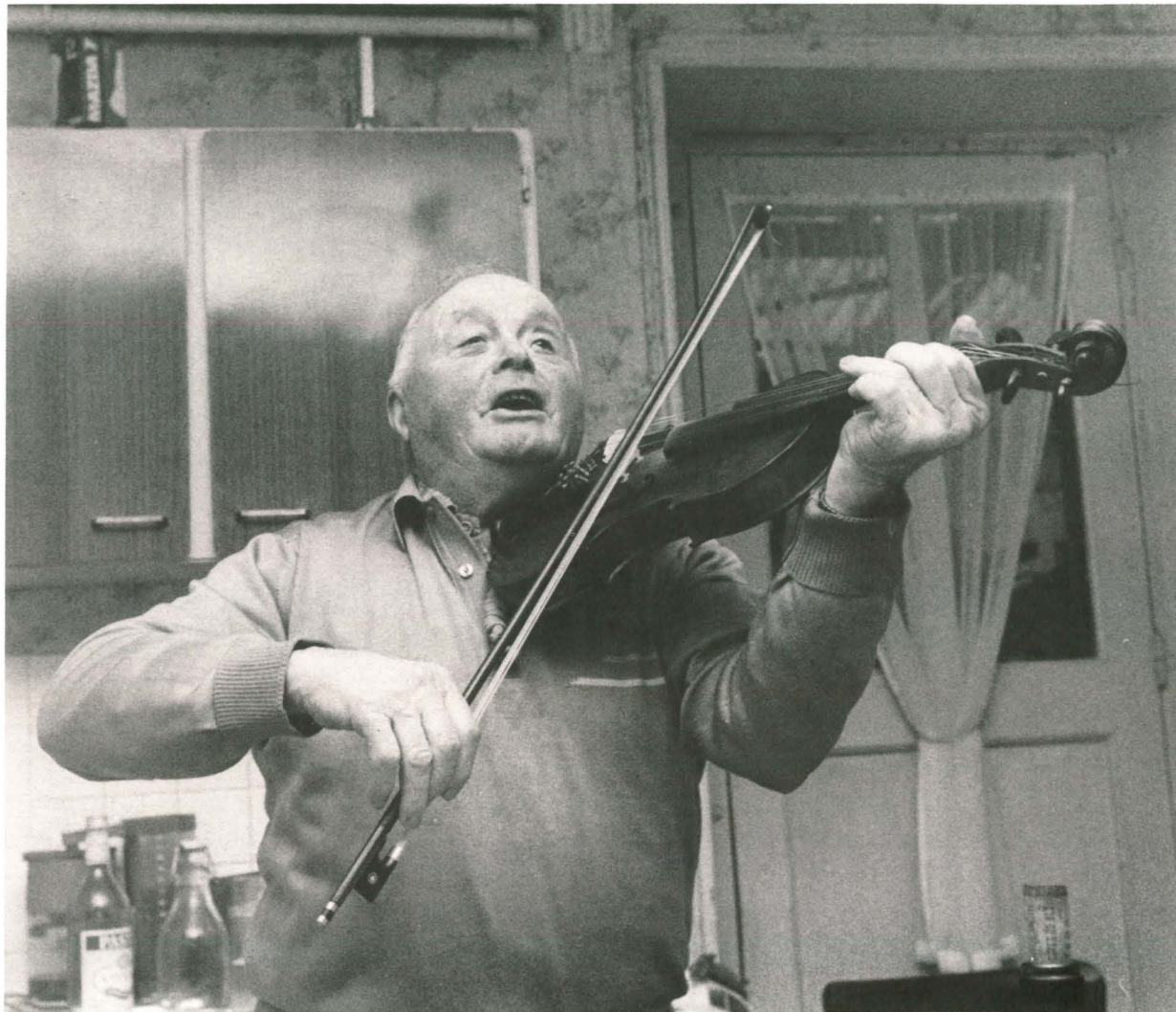
Today's varied mosaic of French-derived or influenced oral traditions in North America results from various migrations: French who came to Quebec or Acadia, others who settled in Louisiana, Acadians who returned to France and then migrated again to Louisiana, French Canadians who came down the Mississippi and settled in Illinois and Missouri, French *coureurs de bois* (woodsmen) who intermarried with American Indians, slaves brought to French colonies to help meet agrarian needs, and Québécois who

immigrated to New England. In some communities a large number of active bearers of these traditions maintain them proudly; in other communities French-derived traditions are scarce, and the number of active bearers very small. In yet others, such as the Métis in North Dakota, French traditions have become part of a new cultural complex through "ethnogenesis." Ethnogenesis is the conscious creation of a new cultural lifestyle by a group of people who, having lost their cultural identity through oppression or assimilation, feel the need to reassert a separate cultural community.

Conjoined Cultures: France and North America.

On July 14, 1789, Parisian citizens took the Bastille, an act that came to symbolize the overturn of the old regime and the beginning of the French Revolution and a new era. A few weeks later, on August 26, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was proclaimed. It contained the formative principles of the French Constitution of 1791. It states that "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights....These rights are Liberty, Property, Safety, and Resistance to Oppression." On another continent, thirty days later, the Bill of Rights was signed in New York as a fulfillment of the American Revolution. Two men on either side of the Atlantic with a shared vision of liberty contributed to these events: Lafayette and Jefferson. Lafayette first served in the American revolutionary army, and later played a leading part in the French Revolution; Jeffersonian ideas were embodied in the political movements on both continents.

The political and philosophical connections between France and the New World were never again as strong and direct as during that period, but France had already established ties to the American continent prior to these historic events. From the early 16th century, French fishermen and mariners from Le Havre, Dieppe, Rouen, Honfleur, and other fishing ports explored the waters off the North American coast. Initially, these mariners carried their haul back to France; soon, however, they began to dry their catch



Louis LeBellanger in his home in Marigny, Normandy. Though the French played a variety of instruments, the fiddle became the dominant instrument in French communities in North America. (Photo by Winnie Lambrecht)

on North American land and established depots in Newfoundland and the Acadian peninsula (the northern coast of Maine, the southern portion of the Gaspé peninsula, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Magdalen Islands). There they first came into contact with native inhabitants such as the Micmac, the Hurons, the Iroquois and the Montagnais.

Curious about these new lands, explorers supported by European courts led expeditions to the New World: Verrazano in 1524, Cartier in 1534, and Champlain, who founded Quebec in 1608 and was later the colony's first governor. These early expeditions led to the beginning of New France and the establishment of French colonies on American soil. An active exchange sprang

up between French fishermen and early settlers seeking furs from their Indian trading partners. By 1630 a number of trading posts were established, and French fishermen wintered in Acadian coves; about 1636 the first families arrived. They came mostly from the western parts of France, searching for economic gain and fleeing from political and religious persecution. These early immigrants brought with them the traditions, beliefs and agricultural and maritime skills that had been passed on to them for generations. The demands of a new environment, the absence of familiar natural resources, and new economic and social challenges brought changes in the tool kit and habits of these settlers. The new circumstances called for both local inventiveness and borrowing

from indigenous populations. Yet many of the French traditions survived, particularly in the verbal arts.

When the first census of the settlement of New France was taken in 1671, many families were headed by craftsmen whose skills were essential for the survival of small communities: tool makers, gunsmiths, coopers, and weavers. Others listed themselves as farmers. Besides the 400 families counted, there were also *coureurs de bois*, fur traders who lived with Indians, and administrative officials. These founding families were seminal in shaping the nature of life in the New World: "three-fourths of all the Acadians living today, either in Louisiana or Canada, or Nova Scotia or Europe are descended from the families listed in the census of 1671" (Stacey 1979:75).

Early 17th century French settlements in the New World attracted English resentment and reprisals. The English felt that these settlers and traders had intruded upon their lands and a series of conflicts ensued. The fur traders who had become the mainstay of French Canada maintained contact with the Huron, the Algonquins, and the Montagnais. These contacts provoked the anger of the Iroquois, who were trading with the British. Rivalries among European colonials and among American Indian groups resulted in a series of wars, culminating with the expulsion of the Acadians by the British, who had tactical and military superiority. On August 1, 1755, Governor Lawrence ordered all French to be removed from Acadia without their possessions.

Though many French settlers had already left Acadia after the area came under British flag in 1713, Governor Lawrence's order in 1755 forced the evacuation of hundreds of Acadians from the lands they had settled. Many French settlers were imprisoned and many others were exiled. This period of imprisonment and deportation, known in French Canadian and French American history as "le Grand Dérangement," continued until the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Exiles were scattered, families torn apart and resettled in the British colonies along the Atlantic seacoast (Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Maryland—the only



In Acadia and Quebec, the survival of musical and dance traditions was sometimes challenged by religious prohibitions. Henri Landry of Ponbriand, Quebec, at the home of friends. (Photo by Lisa Ornstein)

place where they were welcomed, due in part to the Catholic presence in Baltimore). Sixty percent of these exiles died before reaching a safe haven. Rejected from most areas, they eventually found their way to French colonies in the West Indies, went to other parts of Canada, or settled in what would later become Louisiana, then under Spanish control. Throughout the 1760s, Acadians continued to come to Louisiana from temporary refuge in Canada, Nova Scotia and the West Indies.

Other exiles asked to be sent back to France. They were resettled mostly in the seacoast towns of Western France. With no way of supporting themselves and unwilling to settle under the quasi-feudal regime of the French monarchy, most of these families eventually migrated to Louisiana. Most of the Acadians arrived in Louisiana between 1765 and 1785 and settled along the banks

of the Mississippi, Bayou Lafourche, and west of the Atchafalaya Basin on Bayou Teche.

The beginning of a strong French presence in Louisiana dates from the late 17th century. French traders in search of additional sources of furs had moved west to the Great Lakes and then south. Among these explorations, one of the most noteworthy was that of La Salle, who led expeditions down the Mississippi into Louisiana in 1681. In his party were the first Europeans to come to that area and to reach the Gulf of Mexico from the north; they claimed the area for France in 1682 and named it in honor of Louis XIV.

Small groups of settlers gradually came to Louisiana but since few were attracted to the area, the early inhabitants brought Black slaves from the French settlements in the Caribbean to till the land and raise crops. Officials in France also tried to attract other Europeans to the area. In the 1720s, German colonists first arrived in Louisiana, and many moved "up river," north of New Orleans to an area that came to be known as "the German Coast." Stacey (1979:111) writes that "in the 1760s, the provisions generously offered by the settlers of the German Coast saved the Acadian exiles..."

The French settlers selectively appropriated cultural items from the various groups that contributed to the social fabric of life in Louisiana. Among these cultural practices were fishing techniques from the Anglo-Americans and cooking practices from Afro-American slaves. Like earlier colonists, these settlers also came in contact with the indigenous populations of Louisiana such as the Houma, the Choctaw, the Coushatta, and the Tunica-Biloxi. The new residents borrowed certain agricultural practices, foodways and other traditions from the Indians. They learned how to weave palmetto, build dug-out canoes and use local flora for medicinal purposes. The Houma in turn incorporated elements of Acadian culture into their traditional lifestyle. They are said to be "among the most traditional speakers of the Acadian dialect in the state" (Gregory 1985:106). Young Houma children today, particularly in Terrebonne Parish, are more likely to speak

French than their Cajun contemporaries.

The Acadians or Cajuns (as they came to be called) also incorporated cultural items from Black Creoles from the Caribbean. Though Cajuns had few slaves, they were close to large plantations and absorbed the Afro-French Creole language. Contemporary Cajun foods such as gumbo and Cajun music—with its Afro-American blues and Afro-Caribbean rhythmic influences—show direct influence from slaves and free people of color.

The movement of French-speaking immigrants out of French Canada did not stop in the 18th century. During the 19th century, French farmers in Quebec faced many difficulties: low productivity on farms, an inheritance system that led to the fragmentation of farms, and a burgeoning population. Many Québécois migrated to New England, where a thriving textile industry offered seasonal employment to immigrants.

Between 1830 and 1850, the textile industry in New England witnessed an extraordinary boom. The industry had first employed unmarried girls from the rural areas of northern New England. Newly arrived Irish immigrants also provided labor for the growing industry. Between the 1860s and 1900, factory owners turned increasingly to the human resources of Quebec. In 1850 the permanent French-Canadian population in New England was about 20,000; by the 1860s it had doubled. This growth in labor from Quebec was facilitated by "the relative proximity of New England and the availability of cheap, rapid transportation by rail" (Brault 1986:54).

The alarming rate of emigration to New England led to a repatriation campaign by the Quebec government in 1875. Government offers of inexpensive farmland, fare reductions on railroad tickets, and visits to mills by French Canadian clergymen were all part of this effort to stem emigration. As a result "half of the French Canadians who emigrated to New England before 1900 subsequently returned to Quebec" (Brault 1986:82).

Though many French Canadians assimilated to their new homeland, a greater number maintained their language, traditions,



Marie Dean, Houma palmetto weaver at her home in Dulac, Louisiana. French settlers encountered American Indians, borrowing a number of traditions from them, including palmetto weaving. (Photo by Nick Spitzer)

(1) Michif musicians from the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, performed at the 1976 Festival of American Folklife. (Photo by James Pickerell)



Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoine with his family in Eunice, Louisiana. The diatonic accordion was widely adopted by Louisiana musicians, including Afro-French creoles who developed their own musical style called "zydeco." (Photo by Nicholas Spitzer)

and musical repertoire, and their family- and church-centered way of life. The immigrants had come mostly from isolated small rural communities along the St. Lawrence and Richelieu rivers. These self-sufficient farming communities included the parish priest (often the most influential figure in the area), craftsmen and merchants (Brault 1986:8). The immigrants also maintained the ideal of *survivance*, loyalty to the French Canadian inheritance, and the duty of preserving its customs. The result has been a strong sense of ethnic identity and a commitment to preserving the use of the French language, despite the discrimination that French Canadians suffered in New England.

As the French moved west, fur traders and *coureurs de bois* intermarried with American Indians. In spite of a desire on the part of French settlers to maintain their separateness, marriages between Indians and French were not limited to the western or more remote areas of colonization and

many such unions took place. As many as 40% of French Canadians can claim some American Indian ancestry (Dickason 1985:19). Children of French colonists and American Indians often became traders and cultural brokers, intermediaries between the two communities. Their isolation from the rest of New France caused them to adopt ways of life that differed from both their French and their American Indian ancestors, and led to the formation of a distinctive culture known as Métis—literally meaning "mixed"—culture. Métis groups, each with its own history and traditions, are found in various areas of the Great Lakes and north and west of that region. The Michif people of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in north central North Dakota are among those who have retained a number of French derived traditions.

Marriages between the French and the American Indians they encountered and on whom they depended for survival and trade

also produced other elements of culture that partook of both traditions. Michif, the language spoken today by the Métis of the Turtle Mountain Reservation, probably developed early during contact between the French and the Cree. The complex history of the Métis of the area, as well as that of the Cree and the Chippewa, reflects all of the tragedies that characterized the treaties and land claims between the United States government and American Indians. It is made even more complicated by the fact that these American Indians moved freely between what became two distinct countries separated by a boundary that was meaningless to the Cree, the Chippewa and the Métis.

Michif has been considered alternatively as a distinct creole language and as a dialect of Cree. Whatever its classification, it is the language of people on a reservation that is legally Chippewa, whose speakers have moved away from both Cree and Chippewa languages in speech and song. Indeed, J.C. Crawford (1985:233) writes that in Michif, "the noun phrase is a French domain; verb structure is clearly and thoroughly Cree, and syntax is Cree with French and probably English influence. Minor word classes seem to split, some words being French and some Cree."

In Métis music and dance, too, there was an exchange between French and American Indians: the Indian drum was discarded, and music was provided by "the fiddle, sometimes a genuine one but more frequently one made from a hollow piece of wood with cat-gut strings attached. The tunes were generally adaptations of old French folk songs while the dance itself was a lively number which in time became known as the Red River jig" (Dusenberry 1985:121). To French speakers, the songs are recognizable as French, some referring to historical events that took place in the homeland of their French ancestors, such as the lyrics of the song "Napoléon Bonaparte":

En baissant les pavillons est mort Napoléon.
Napoléon n'existerait plus.
Nous parlerons de son histoire.

"Je suis fort, fort bien entouré.
Adieu Français. Adieu la France. C'est pour toujours.
Tous les regrets j'ai dans ce monde c'est ma femme et mon cher enfant.
Adieu Français. Adieu la France. C'est pour toujours."

The flags are being lowered, Napoleon has died.
He no longer lives.
We will tell of his story.
"I am surrounded from all sides.
Adieu Frenchmen. Adieu France. Forever Adieu.
Of all I miss in this world, it is especially my wife and my dear child.
Adieu Frenchmen. Adieu France. Forever adieu."
(*Turtle Mountain Music*, 1984)

Music in the New World

Mariners who came from France to exploit the fishing banks along the Acadian coasts accompanied their sailing and fishing efforts with work songs. The composition of fishing crews changed over the years, with seasonal crews recruited from the farmland interior in addition to year-round mariners. There is nevertheless a certain unity in the musical repertoire these crews brought to the shores of the New World. Musical instruments also accompanied sailors on their journeys, as attested by Admiral Thévenard in 1776: "One of the concerns that good seamen know the importance of is the entertainment provided to crews during long journeys and periods without wind" (cited in *Chants de marins traditionnels des côtes de France* 1984). Horns and trumpets, bagpipes, hurdy-gurdies and musettes all found their way onto sailing and fishing vessels.

Even though the first settlers in the New World shared the same traditions, language and religion, the priorities of their new life, the agricultural cycle, and the manner in which celebrations were observed moved their musical cultures in a direction different from that of the mariners. The small, self-sufficient farms of the colonists under the strong influence of the Church resulted in a culture distinct from that of France. "The



The parents of these children were prohibited from speaking French in public schools, but today's generation benefits from a cultural revival that encourages traditions such as this children's Mardi Gras parade in Eunice, Louisiana. (Photo by Winnie Lambrecht)

Church always directed and molded the acts and the thoughts of colonists, who, cut from their roots, had nothing in their new land to feed the beliefs and practices that had sustained them in their place of origin," according to Desdouits (1986:30). The Church undoubtedly modified the nature of the dance and music traditions that survived or developed in Quebec and Acadia. Dance was viewed as frivolous if not sinful activity.

This state of affairs prevailed in France as well, where dance and music on Sunday and holy days were vociferously condemned, as an extract from a 1710 document from Plouaret indicates:

Nous avons condamné Gillette Kerguentel femme de Yves Le Sohier à 3 livres d'aumosne au profit de la fabrice de l'église de Plouaret pour avoir fait sonner et danser à jour de dimanche et Gilles Salic aussi à trois livres d'aumosne pour avoir fait sonné le même jour, avec

défense de les recevoir à la participation des sacrements jusques à y avoir satisfait.

We have condemned Gillette Kerguentel, wife of Yves Le Sohier, to a three pound contribution to the maintenance of the church of Plouaret because of her incitement to music and dance on a Sunday, and Gilles Salic also to a three pound charitable contribution for playing on that same day; it is forbidden to them to partake of the sacraments until they fulfill this obligation. (Bécam 1989:9)

In France, Church influence was lessened by the existence of other institutions and larger communities. There were, however, other reasons for the musics of the two continents to diverge. Musical traditions and repertoires transported from France were reshaped by contact with other cultures. Musical instrument making was not a priority in the colonies. Growing crops in a new



Hurdy-gurdy players Jean Gauçon and Joseph Quintin at home in Languieux, Brittany. The hurdy-gurdy was popular in Western France when the French first migrated to North America, but it never established itself in the New World. (Photo by Winnie Lambrecht)

environment, conflicts with some American Indian groups and English settlers, and the lack of skilled artisans to provide adequate tools all reduced the opportunity for making musical instruments. Also, some of the instruments that were popular in France were not made for life in a colonial setting, such as the hurdy-gurdy (which seems to be making a comeback in Quebec, mostly with revivalist musicians).

Although the original French immigrants to the New World had brought with them few musical instruments, the Acadians were lovers of music and of dance. Where musical instruments were not available (or were forbidden, such as during Lent) dances were accompanied by voices, hand-clapping and foot-stamping. The musical traditions of western France (hometown to most of the Acadians) included brass and reed instruments, as well as trumpets and the *vielle à roue* (hurdy-gurdy). Given the priorities of colonial life and limitations in instrument

manufacture, the immigrants made do with new instruments borrowed from other peoples. Many of the tunes that the French immigrants brought with them were easily transposed to violins, which were more readily available. French settlers in Acadia incorporated Scots-Irish reels, jigs and hornpipes into their musical repertoires, and danced schottisches, mazurkas and contredanses.

Today these traditions continue and develop in Quebec and New England. New England communities such as Waltham, Massachusetts, have large populations of Acadian and Québécois descent with many formidable musicians, especially fiddlers and singers. In Quebec couple dances other than the waltz are now less visible, but contredanses, quadrilles, cotillons, *rondes* and *set carrés* (square dances) are popular in many communities. An unbroken community dance tradition thrives in places such as l'Ile d'Orleans and the Saguenay—Lac-St-



Gilbert Hervieux, luthier, working at the Hervieux & Glet workshop in Le Val, Rieux. (Photo by Winnie Lambrecht)

Jean area; other social events have sprung up recently, such as those held regularly in Montreal. *Veillées* (musical evenings) are as likely to take place in community halls as in private homes, and frequent day-long *galas* showcase the talents of regional musicians. During Christmas and on New Year's Day families and friends gather for song and celebration; for *La Fête de St-Jean-Baptiste* in June, people throughout the province gather for parades, bonfires and concerts of traditional music in a celebration that today is more nationalistic than religious.

For French speakers in Quebec and, indeed, in every Canadian province, the question of language has long been inseparable from issues of identity and access to power and self-determination. A 1980 referendum to take steps toward provincial secession from Canada was rejected; still, many Québécois are adamant in demanding the right to use French in their daily lives without sacrificing political and economic equality with English speakers. In recent years increasing exposure to English-language media, economic pressures to assimilate to

the Anglophone world that surrounds them, an influx of immigrants who want their children's second language to be English instead of French, and the steadily dropping birth rate among Québécois of French ancestry cause consternation among those who fear that their language and culture will disappear.

In Louisiana, toward the end of the 19th century, resettled Acadians adopted the diatonic accordion that had been imported by German immigrants, and incorporated a number of fiddle tunes, ballads, square dances and hoedowns from the increasing number of Anglo-Americans to their north. The repertoire of songs and instrumental music in Louisiana was further influenced by Black musical traditions. Afro-French Creoles in Louisiana developed their own musical style called "zydeco" by modifying Cajun tonality and adding improvisation and Afro-Caribbean rhythm patterns. This tradition is particularly strong today in the musical performances of people such as Canray Fontenot, "Bois Sec" Ardoin, John Delafosse, The Lawtell Playboys, Nathan Williams and the Zydeco Cha Chas, and others playing regularly in clubs in southern Louisiana.

The continuity, isolation, creolization and—in some cases—end of musical traditions are indicators of the struggle for ethnic, economic and cultural survival of French-speaking peoples and those with whom they came into contact over the last four centuries. Indeed, in Louisiana until quite recently, children were chastised for speaking French in public schools. Recognizing the persistence and importance of traditional culture and speech, the Committee for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created in 1968. French, which had until then been an oral tradition, was offered in public schools and Cajun children have become literate in French.

As with other French-speaking communities in North America, an identifiably French musical repertoire was sustained in Louisiana, along with foodways and material culture that mark the state as a homeland to settlers of the French "diaspora." Today, revitalization of traditional music and recognition for continuing and transformed tradi-

tions comment aesthetically on the cultural health of French-speaking communities from Quebec and New England to North Dakota, Louisiana and Missouri.

Regional Culture in France

In the French areas that provided the North American continent with many of its immigrants, regionalism is perhaps as strong as it was at the time of the French Revolution. This cultural distinctiveness is most marked in Brittany, a region divided in half linguistically, one half speaking Breton (a Celtic language related to Welsh) and the other half classified as Gallo and speaking French. In the western part of Brittany (Basse-Bretagne) people take pride in speaking Breton, and one often hears parents addressing their children in that language, even though the official school language is French. In 1982 the Ministry of National Education, under parental pressure, opened the first bilingual classes in kindergarten and primary schools in Brittany. Six years later, bilingual education is available in five of the six counties in Brittany. Teachers in these bilingual classes had to be self-taught, and there is strong pressure today to make a higher degree available for the purpose of teaching in bilingual classes. It is interesting to note parallels with Louisiana and Quebec.

In Brittany, there is a distinct Breton song repertoire, although a number of musicians sing in both Breton and French and draw from both traditions. What might these Bretons and Gallos have in common with the *petits habitants*, the small farmers exiled from Acadia who became the Cajuns of Louisiana? Given the centuries of separation and the complexities of the history of each region, one might speculate there is little connection. But a well-known traditional song in the repertoire of Breton musicians Jean Gauçon and Joseph Quitin is "Trois gars partis pour l'Amérique" ("Three guys who left for America"). It was thus not only for the emigrants that America became a theme in folklore, but also for those who were left behind.

In addition to Basse-Bretagne and Haute-Bretagne, Normandy and Poitou were also

home to the ancestors of present-day Francophone populations in North America. Each of these areas has distinct musical and dance traditions, and a regional speech pattern. Though bagpipes are found throughout France, the *veuze* is specific to the Marais-Vendéen, whereas the *biniau* is prevalent in Brittany. Normans prefer to accompany wedding processions with the fiddle, while in central Brittany the clarinet is a favorite. The accordion has replaced older instruments almost everywhere. In the Sarthe region, the accordion provides the accompaniment for the *pas d'été*, a dance form introduced in western France by retired military masters and their apprentices. The variety of music in France is infinite; a distance of a few hundred kilometers may separate considerably different cultural styles with distinct musical repertoires.

What all the areas presented at the Festival share is a renewed interest in traditional repertoires. In some instances, younger performers and craftspeople are direct heirs to an unbroken tradition. Raised in a particular region and conscious of the importance and beauty of the traditions borne by their families, they acquire the skills of their forefathers. Such is the case, for instance, for Jean Gauçon of Brittany, Dewey Balfa of Louisiana, and Dominique and Paul-Emile Lavallée of Quebec. Others, having become conscious of the importance of their region's heritage, deliberately decide to carry on the tradition even though it may not have been present in their family. In some instances, the tradition has been interrupted briefly: for example, though Thierry Bertrand is from a woodworking family, and his musical instrument making is thus in keeping with the family skills, his construction of the Breton *veuze* (bagpipe) is a deliberate attempt to bring back an instrument that had all but disappeared. Other performers and craftspeople are more clearly "revivalists"; attracted by older traditions from their area or from other areas, they consciously decide to recreate these traditions whether or not their own ancestors subscribed to those traditions. Though folklorists tend to be less interested in revivalists than in other performers, revivalists have proven to be crucial

in the maintenance of certain traditions and their associated knowledge. Revivalists from the area whose traditions they represent often interview older people to inform themselves about these traditions, conducting research and collecting information that might otherwise be lost. Such is the case of Yves Guillard from the Sarthe region of Normandy and the character dances that he has choreographed under the supervision of musicians and old masters who saw them being performed during their youth.

What animates both the perpetuation of traditional forms and their revival is the desire of tradition bearers, individuals or communities, to assert their distinct identity, to fight against homogenization, to maintain the right vested in all human beings to express themselves in the manner that their ancestors bequeathed to them. In those areas where the dominant society attempted to enforce cultural assimilation, as in Acadia, Quebec, Louisiana and Brittany, determination to maintain the right of self-expression makes itself felt most strongly and results in the perpetuation of traditional forms—language and music—that serve as carriers of communal identity.

As we consider and celebrate the continuity and creolization, survival and revival of French traditions in the Old and New Worlds, it is useful to recall that The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen can be considered a statement about cultural conservation—the right to sing your own song, tell your own story, enact your own ritual or festival. Language, music and verbal artistry are instruments and indicators of cultural survival. Join us as Poitevins, Cajuns, Creoles, Houmas, Bretons, Québécois, Vendéens, New Englanders, Michifs, Normans and Missourians sing, perform, dance, think and speak in French during this bicentennial year of the French Revolution.

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