

French-Canadian Nationalism and the Beginnings of Folklore Studies in Quebec

Janet McNaughton

Volume 7, Number 1-2, 1985

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081327ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081327ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

McNaughton, J. (1985). French-Canadian Nationalism and the Beginnings of Folklore Studies in Quebec. *Ethnologies*, 7(1-2), 129–147.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081327ar>

French-Canadian Nationalism and the Beginnings of Folklore Studies in Quebec

Janet McNAUGHTON

Historically there has been a strong relationship between nationalism and an interest in folk culture. In Quebec, as in many other places, attention was paid to forms of folklore for many decades before serious academic study was undertaken. The incorporation of ethnographic material in works of literature, the adaptation of folk music themes in more formal compositions and the revival of traditional handicrafts have often been seen as means of preserving culture thought to be unique to specific ethnic groups. This has been especially true where such groups are minorities. These activities are often far removed from the work of the academically trained folklorist. In spite of this, they are part of the history of our discipline.

This article will explore the relationship between the development of French-Canadian nationalism and the rise of an interest in folklore in Quebec from the beginnings of English rule until the period between the two world wars. Attention will be given to the type of folklore-related activities mentioned above as well as more academic endeavours. Related trends of national romanticism and primitivism, which influenced attitudes towards traditional expressive culture will also be discussed.

National romanticism, which began in Germany in the eighteenth century, significantly influenced the early interest in folklore in Quebec. Briefly, it may be characterized as an intellectual movement in which folk culture is viewed as an expression of a unique national past. Adherents to this school of thought believe that folklore should be utilized by academically trained artists to create new manifestations of national culture. Folk revival, the explicit effort to maintain and promote items of folk culture that may no longer be con-

sidered important by those who originally maintained specific traditions, often plays an important role in national romantic movements.¹

The development of the "acute sense of group-consciousness", which may be regarded as nationalism, emerged in Quebec in the early nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of a francophone middle class.² The major factors contributing to the development of this nationalism were economic. During the last decades of the eighteenth century, French-Canadian traders lost considerable economic control of the fur trade by remaining staunchly individualistic in the face of conditions that increasingly demanded pooled capital and effort.³ The generally conservative middle class was unwilling to move into vital new sectors of the economy, such as lumbering and ship building. As a result, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, French-Canadians in Quebec had no talented or powerful businessmen to provide economic leadership. The society was left to the economic guidance of "a lower middle class made up of notaries, lawyers, physicians, land-surveyors and small businessmen. . .who were hardly even conscious of the new economic requirements, let alone ready to lead their countrymen toward meeting them."⁴ So the economy came to be controlled by English merchants and ambitious Loyalists.

Agriculture remained one of the chief spheres of influence for francophones. The pre-conquest seigniorial system had been maintained by the British as a means of establishing rapport with the francophone élite who remained after the conquest. This system was a type of land tenure derived from, though not identical to, French feudalism. Estates along the St. Lawrence River valley had been granted to seigniors, élite land owners, who reserved part of the land for themselves and divided the balance into farms which were granted to rural settlers, known as habitants. The seigniorial system involved reciprocal responsibilities for seignior and habitant. The influx of anglophone Loyalists at the time of the American revolution did not precipitate the type of cruel land transfer that led to the Acadian expulsions in 1755, nor significantly alter this system.

-
1. For further discussion of national romanticism see William A. Wilson, "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (1973), 819-835.
 2. Jean-Claude Bonenfant and Jean-Claude Falardeau, "Culture and Political Implications of French-Canadian Nationalism," in *French-Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology*, ed. Ramsay Cook Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1969, p. 19.
 3. Fernand Ouellet, "The Historical Background of Separatism in Quebec," in *French-Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology*, ed. Ramsay Cook, p. 52.
 4. Ouellet, p. 52.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, agriculture declined in Quebec, then known as Lower Canada, until the region became dependent on Upper Canada (Ontario) for supplies. The decline has been attributed to a continuance of the outmoded seigniorial system and lack of innovation in agricultural technology. The decline in agriculture might have been corrected by political reforms such as the abolition of the seigniorial system, which would have facilitated the introduction of new technology. A more modern education system designed to produce skilled workers and a managerial class would also have helped the francophone population to regain control of their economy. The political élite required to accomplish such reforms did not exist at that time because French-Canadians were not sufficiently accustomed to the British parliamentary system to be able to use it to their advantage.⁵ This new form of government had only been introduced in Lower Canada in 1791, when a reluctant British government had finally acceded to the demands of the Loyalists.

In this atmosphere, the first stage of Québécois nationalism emerged. A nationalism characterized as "defensive" and based in the francophone middle class.⁶ It was also an isolationist movement, which directed a good deal of hostility towards the anglophones who dominated the economy, which might otherwise have been controlled by the very francophones who fostered this nationalism. Two important institutions to emerge from this first wave of nationalism were a political party called the Patriotes, and la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, a nationalist organization.

The Patriotes party emerged during the election of 1827, under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau. While the party expressed concern for liberal issues such as social progress, democracy and reform, it was characterized by an aggressive and intense nationalism, as manifest in its programme to boycott British products.⁷

Initially, the rural habitants took little interest in this nationalism. From 1826 on, however, the crisis in agriculture intensified with the failure of wheat, the staple crop. At the same time, increased population resulted in counterproductive subdivision of the limited arable land. As their traditional economy began to crumble, the habitants were increasingly receptive to the nationalist message. In 1834, members of the Patriotes party founded la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste. It was hoped that the organization would establish stronger ties between

5. *Ibid.*

6. Bonenfant and Falardeau, p. 19.

7. *Ibid.*

the francophone élite and the habitants, groups which had drifted apart as social structures became more diverse. The purpose of the society was to "unite French-Canadians and give them a rallying cry," and early meetings took the form of banquets.⁸ New leaders of the Patriotes party were eventually drawn from the ranks of la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, so even at this early date the distinction between political and cultural goals was blurred.

Through the institutions of the Patriotes party and la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the middle class

started shaping a vocation of their own wherein were consecrated both their role as a lay élite and their right to act as spokesmen for an agricultural, feudal society.⁹

In shaping this vocation, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the importance of agriculture to the future of French Canada. Nor is it surprising, for agriculture was one area of the economy still controlled by francophones. But in stressing a declining sector of the economy the nationalists were resisting involvement in economic progress. Many of the reformers in the Patriotes were openly anti-clerical, but la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste stressed the unconscious relationship between patriotism and religion and promoted "a true reverence for tradition and the institutions of the past."¹⁰ While the Société itself did not directly encourage activities related to folklore studies, it certainly helped to create a climate in which a nationalistic and romantic interest in the past would flourish.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a new respect for traditions and interest in habitant culture was emerging as a significant trend in French-Canadian literature. The French-Canadians who wrote in this vein were influenced by the romantic writers of France who had responded to national romanticism as it became a major source in European intellectual life by turning their attention to peasant culture.¹¹ But circumstances in French Canada had made an interest in indigenous rural culture a logical progression for educated francophones on this side of the Atlantic, and the Canadian movement was as much organic as imitative. French-Canadian authors influenced by European national romanticism included Philippe Aubert de Gaspé,

8. *Ibid.*

9. Ouellet, p. 53.

10. Bonenfant and Falardeau, p. 21.

11. Luc Lacourcière, "The Present State of French-Canadian Folklore Studies," in *Folklore Research Around the World*, ed. Richard Dorson, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1961, p. 88.

Joseph-Charles Taché, Honoré Beaugrand and Louis Frechette. These men were motivated by a desire to preserve and popularize French-Canadian folk culture, and drew chiefly upon the genres of legend, custom and belief in their writings. Historian Ramsay Cook states that the goal of the nationalist novelists was

to emphasize la vocation rurale of French Canada. Indeed, the whole literary school of 1860...was devoted to the glorification and deification of the rural mission.¹²

The movement did not involve formal collecting of folklore, but it is significant because it helped to entrench national romanticism and a related interest in habitant culture in the intellectual life of French Canada. These interests would eventually give rise to the serious collection of folklore.

The literary trend of the 1860s was only part of a more general movement in French Canada which placed great emphasis on the importance of habitant culture to the maintenance of a distinct French-Canadian identity. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasis on a mystic attachment of the people to the land would become central to French-Canadian nationalism. Traditional forms of expressive culture were seen as manifestations of the romantic past, and so became significant to francophone cultural identity.

Ernest Gagnon, the first folksong collector in Quebec, was contemporary with the national romantic writers of the 1860s. Born in 1839, Gagnon was a musician who completed his training in France at the time when that country was organizing its first collections of folksongs by decree of Napoleon III. Upon returning to Canada, Gagnon became the organist at the Quebec Basilica and began to collect folksongs. In 1865 his *Chansons populaires du Canada* was published. The book contained one hundred songs which Gagnon collected from educated acquaintances as well as rural habitants. Most of the songs originated in France, but some were native to Quebec.

The importance of *Chansons populaires du Canada* cannot be overstated. Folklorist Luc Lacourcière has likened the significance of Gagnon's work for folksong study in Canada to that of Child's work for ballad scholarship in the United States.¹³ The work went through numerous editions and did much to encourage a popular interest in folksongs in Quebec.

12. Ramsay Cook, *Canada and the French-Canadian Question*, Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1974, p. 85.

13. Lacourcière, p. 89.

Gagnon was also one of the first musicians in Canada to base his compositions on folk music themes and to produce classical arrangements of folksongs. As early as 1858, Gagnon wrote *Stadconé*, a "danse sauvage" for piano. Helmet Kallman and Stephen Willis note that this may have been the first piece of art music imitative of native themes.

Chansons populaires du Canada included the music of collected songs without formal arrangements. Gagnon did, however, compose formal musical settings for many of the songs and these arrangements were later published as *Les soirées du Québec* in 1877, *Cantiques populaires du Canada français* in 1897 and *Chants canadiens* (n.d.). Kallman and Willis note that "after 1865, whether inspired by Gagnon or drawing on personal familiarity with folksong, more and more [Québécois] musicians adapted such folk material."¹⁴

As a collector of folksongs, Gagnon worked alone and did not, within his lifetime, inspire any disciples. Lacourcière has noted a significant gap between the work of Gagnon and that of Marius Barbeau, the French-Canadian anthropologist who began to collect from members of his own culture around 1914.¹⁵ It may be useful to attempt to explain this gap in terms of French-Canadian nationalism. This interpretation is based on the supposition that political events will not immediately manifest change in so subliminal a social trend as attitudes towards folklore. So, just as the events of the 1820s and 30s helped to create a nationalism that gave rise to an interest in folk culture in the 1860s, examination of events from the 1840s onward can help to explain the gap between Gagnon and Barbeau.

The failed rebellion of 1837 led to the Durham report, which recommended uniting the parliaments of Upper and Lower Canada into a single government in which the use of French would be expressly forbidden. The recommendation was implemented in the Union Act of 1841, one of the stated purposes of which was the assimilation of French-Canadian culture. The opposite effect was achieved.¹⁶ The cultural threat posed by the Union Act seemed to bring forth new energies and also coincided with a real mastery of the British parliamentary system by francophone Canadians. From that time on, "French-Canadian nationalism. . .took a strong political orien-

14. Helmut Kallmann and Stephen Willis, "Folk-music-inspired composition," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, p. 344.

15. Lacourcière, p. 90.

16. Bonenfant and Falardeau, p. 22.

tation within the context of British parliamentary institutions."¹⁷ It resulted in a new balance of power and the emergence of a francophone political élite. Under the leadership of Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, progressive French-Canadians allied themselves with the reformers of Canada West (Ontario) in the new joint parliament. There resulted considerable social reforms in the fields of education, municipal affairs and agriculture during the Union Act period.

Given this more positive direction of energies, it is not surprising that francophone nationalists became "less aggressive, less vocal and more oriented toward practical developments," thus contributing to the climate of good will between the two ethnic groups that led to Confederation in 1867.¹⁸ Moreover, the bond between rural habitant and the educated classes now seemed less important to the upper and middle classes than it had in previous years. There was a general decline in interest in habitant culture among educated francophones in the years following Confederation as energies were directed to more concrete endeavours. The trend towards a serious examination of rural culture which had begun in the 1860s died out accordingly.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, folk culture was given little attention by intellectuals in Quebec. A branch of the American Folklore Society was established in Montreal in 1892, due to the brief interest in Franco-American folk culture which was generated by the research of Alcée Fortier in Louisiana. But this interest did not last, and the Montreal branch of the AFS was more or less annexed by educated anglophones who concerned themselves with armchair study of native Indian and other exotic cultures. Members of the Montreal branch of the AFS were not involved in any significant collecting of French-Canadian folklore until the organization was revitalised by Barbeau in 1914.

The good will which led to, and continued briefly after Confederation, was entirely destroyed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. During that time much of the political interaction between anglophone and francophone Canadians was marked by conflict and hostility. Briefly, the major events which contributed to this climate were the Métis uprisings, which ended in 1885 with the execution of Louis Riel; the Manitoba schools crisis of the 1890s, which led to a Supreme Court decision that declared English to be the only official language in that

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

province; Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's decision in 1899 to allow Canada to participate in the Boer War; and the conscription crisis of World War I.

In each of the first three cases, the majority of francophones were strongly opposed to the decision finally reached by the government or the courts. The Métis rebellions were essentially conflicts between native peoples and encroaching Europeans, but many of the Métis, including Riel, were francophone and Catholic. In Quebec, the Métis struggles were identified as attempts to preserve French-Canadian culture in the face of non-French immigration. The outcome of the Manitoba schools crisis crushed the cherished hope of francophones that the west would be opened as an integrated bilingual area. The Boer War was generally regarded in Quebec as an Imperial effort to repress the rights of a linguistic minority.

The conscription crisis of World War I was an extremely heated clash in which Quebec was accused of being indifferent to the Empire. It is now recognized that the idea that Quebec was not contributing a fair share to the war effort is not entirely accurate. A large percentage of the men recruited from other provinces were British-born, and could naturally be expected to feel more responsibility to Britain than native born Canadians of either linguistic group.

Due to all these events, there was throughout the period a sense of disillusionment with Confederation in Quebec. Francophone Canadians had entered into Confederation believing that it would be a partnership of equals, and now it seemed as if anglophones would dominate.

At the same time, the agrarian way of life which had become so important to French-Canadian cultural identity appeared to be threatened. Virtually all the arable land in Quebec lies along the river valleys of the St. Lawrence and its tributaries. From the 1850s on, almost all of this land was being farmed. The rural people of Quebec were urged to remain on the land for nationalistic reasons, but this was often not economically possible. In the last half of the nineteenth century, about half a million French-Canadians emigrated to anglophone areas of North America.

It was also a time of increasing urbanization. From the turn of the century, there was a sharp decline in the rural population of Quebec. In 1890, about one-third of the population was urban. By 1910, this figure had risen to nearly one-half, and by 1911, slightly less than

one-third of Quebec's population was involved in farming.¹⁹

The trend toward urbanization was in keeping with events in other parts of North America; Ontario exhibits almost identical statistics for the same time. But in Quebec, the decline of the rural population was seen as a threat to francophone cultural identity. This identity was felt to be rooted in farming and Roman Catholicism. Agriculture was the one area of the economy which was, for almost a century, completely controlled by francophones. As such, it was symbolic of the French-Canadian way of life. Such symbolism had been intensified by the national romantic writing of the 1860s. After the French Revolution, the Catholic clergy in Quebec had come to regard French-Canadians as the francophone people chosen to carry on God's mission on earth. As the idea gained general acceptance, religion and nationalism became inseparable. The Church was organized on the rural parish system, and it was felt that those who left their parishes to live in urban centres would drift away from its influence.

For these reasons, a concerted effort was made by the government of Quebec and the Roman Catholic Church, in the early decades of this century, to keep the people on the land. The attempt took the form of colonization of the northern areas of the province, and programmes such as the Department of Agriculture's efforts to encourage a home textile industry. During this time, the importance of agrarianism to francophone cultural identity was again stressed. In 1902, the ultramontane editor of *La Vérité*, Jules-Paul Tardivel, summarized the relation of nationalism, the land and the Church, stating

... it is not necessary that we possess industry and money. We will no longer be French-Canadian but American almost like the others. Our mission is to possess the earth and spread ideas. To cling to the soil, to raise large families, to maintain the hearth of intellectual and spiritual life, that must be our role in America.²⁰

Also around 1900, the new surge of nationalist feeling took concrete form in a new political movement, the *Ligue Nationaliste Canadienne*. The organization was characterized by "a middle-class leadership with its status consciousness, fear of big business but rejection of socialism, emphasis on a non-partisan approach, and, not

19. Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976, p. 148.

20. Cook, p. 86.

least of all, nationalism".²¹ Initially the Ligue was interested in economics and economic reform. Over the years however, members of the movement became increasingly concerned with less progressive, more traditional issues.

In the early years, the movement centred on the charismatic personality of Henri Bourassa. Grandson of the famous rebel Papineau, Bourassa became a focal point for nationalist feelings in Quebec when he resigned his seat in the federal parliament to protest Canadian involvement in the Boer War, and was returned to office by acclamation. Significantly, Bourassa was not a separatist. He believed in the equal importance of the two charter ethnic groups in Canada, and in working within the established political system. Unlike his grandfather, Bourassa was religious and supported the role of the Church in French Canada. The political programme of the Ligue Nationaliste was based on anti-imperialism aroused by the Boer War, the need for integral bilingualism in Canada, the autonomy of both Canada within the Empire and Quebec within the country, opposition to European immigration, and the settlement of the minority schools problem.

The conscription crisis of World War I considerably heightened nationalistic feelings in Quebec and conservative, Church oriented nationalism emerged with strong popular support. By 1917, French-Canadian nationalism was inward-looking, ultra-clerical, and more politically passive than it had been in previous years.²²

After World War I, these conservative nationalists became concerned by the industrialization that was accelerating in North America and beginning to encroach upon Quebec. Industrialization contributed to urbanization, which as we have seen was regarded as a threat in itself. In addition, like most economic changes in Quebec since the decline of the fur trade, industrialization was "financed, directed and controlled from the outside."²³ The impetus for change came mainly from anglophones, who saw the province as an excellent source of cheap labour and raw materials.

In the inter-war period, such inward-looking nationalism helped to create a climate in which traditional ways of life and forms of expressive culture were once again of interest to educated, urban French-Canadians. In 1923, Bourassa wrote, "our race will survive, grow and prosper in the measure that it remains peasant and rustic."²⁴

21. Cook, p. 95.

22. Cook, p. 112.

23. Cook, p. 84.

24. Cook, p. 96.

Although historic circumstances in Quebec created a special relationship between folk culture and nationalism, it would be wrong to assume that Quebec was totally unique in North America. The perceived value of traditional rural culture was further enhanced by the belief that such culture was endangered by modernization and the middle class, urban Québécois who believed it had counterparts in much of North America. In the inter-war period, innovations such as electricity, the automobile and the radio brought technological change into daily life, and modernization became increasingly difficult to ignore. As North Americans felt threatened by these rapid and far-reaching changes, they took refuge in an attitude towards folk culture that is best characterized as primitivist.

Primitivism is an unfortunate term in that folk cultures are as likely to be subject to this form of idealization as are primitive cultures. It is more often a subliminal attitude than a consciously embraced philosophy and has been simply defined as "the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it."²⁵ Anthropologist John C. Messenger defines primitivism more specifically as:

the idealization of the past or future cultural estates of contemporary primitive and folk cultures. . . [I]t provides psychological compensation for frustrations created by personal or social disorganization. . . Central to the primitivist position is the belief that civilization has dehumanized man and undermined his valued institutions; it has caused social bonds to disintegrate, fostered immorality and created mental illness on a vast scale. Primitive and folk peoples, according to this view, represent man as he once was and could or should be again were civilized society drastically reformed.²⁶

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the kind of personal and social disorganization of which Messenger writes. In a largely unconscious attempt to compensate for the frustrations caused by such change, primitivism gained wide currency among upper and middle class urbanized North Americans. This primitivism often took the form of an interest in folk cultures, and examples abound. A market for handmade crafts developed among affluent urbanites, facilitating handicrafts revivals in both Quebec and the American Appalachians. Henry Ford, who was ironically a major innovator of technological!

25. Arthur Oncken Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, 1935; rpt. New York, Octagon Books, Inc., 1974, p. 7.

26. John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, pp. 4-5.

change, sponsored highly successful old-time fiddle competitions to foster an interest in folk music.²⁷ Large folk festivals began to be staged in North America in the inter-war period, and it is not surprising to find that the first of these were held in Quebec.²⁸ At the same time, serious scholars began to turn their attentions to the study of folk and primitive cultures. In Canada, anthropologist Marius Barbeau was among the first.

It has been noted that "contemporary embodiments of [the] primitivist ideal have usually been found among races not intimately known to, and existing at some considerable distance from" the people who embrace the concept of primitivism.²⁹ The rural inhabitants of Quebec were not far removed from their urban counterparts, though geographic distance, and differences of class and education did separate the two groups. In spite of this, and mainly for the nationalistic reasons outlined above, the habitants of Quebec came to be regarded as an embodiment of the primitivist ideal in Canada. Anglophone Canadians regarded French-Canadian folk culture in a similar light, though it would seem that they did so for purely primitivist reasons. In this, urbanized Anglo-Canadians were like their American counterparts who similarly romanticised the Appalachian mountaineer. Thus we find, for both anglophone and francophone Canadians who did not actively partake of this culture, that habitant folklore came to symbolize the more cohesive, humanistic and happy society that was supposed to have existed prior to modernization. By the 1920s these attitudes were so pervasive that it is difficult to find any material on French-Canadian folklore, whether in French or English, that is not clouded with sentiment. Endowed with this new mystique, a vital interest in the examination of traditional rural culture rapidly emerged in Quebec in the early decades of this century.

The Québécois who began to collect folklore at this time did so mainly in the revitalized Montreal branch of the American Folklore Society with the encouragement of Marius Barbeau. While they were responding, in part, to influences that were also felt by their anglophone counterparts, their approach was quite different. In the En-

27. See Paul F. Wells, "Mellie Dunham: Maine's Champion Fiddler," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* 12 (1975), 112-115, for a discussion of Ford's interest in fiddle competitions.

28. See Janet McNaughton, "A Study of the CPR-Sponsored Quebec Folk Song and Handicraft Festivals, 1927-1930," unpublished M.A. thesis, Memorial University, 1982, for a history of these first North American folk festivals.

29. Lovejoy and Boas, p. 8.

glish speaking world, those who examined folklore at the beginning of this century were literary scholars who concerned themselves almost exclusively with folksongs, which they regarded as a form of ancient poetry. In Quebec motivations for collecting folklore were more nationalistic than literary, and the approach was more eclectic. Barbeau and his collaborators did collect folksongs, but they also gathered folk tales, and were concerned with material culture such as traditional textiles and wood carving. This more inclusive approach to folklore may also have been due to Barbeau's training as an anthropologist.

Barbeau has been the subject of numerous scholarly publications in recent years. For this reason I will outline his biography very briefly. Charles Marius Barbeau was born in Beauce county, Quebec in 1883. He received a conventional university education and was awarded a Rhodes scholarship, which sent him to Oxford in 1907 to study anthropology. After returning to Canada, Barbeau was hired by the National Museum in 1911 to study native Indian populations. Throughout his long career, however, he devoted a good deal of time and energy to the study of French-Canadian folk culture, and he is rightly considered the father of academic folklore studies in Canada.

To fully understand Barbeau's approach to folk culture, it is useful to trace the various influences that shaped his early years. As a schoolboy in the late 1800s, Barbeau could hardly fail to be exposed to the national romantic works of Québécois writers of the 1860s. By the late 1800s, these writers had become cultural icons of Quebec nationalism and culture, and no education would have been considered complete without a knowledge of their works. While in England, Barbeau may also have encountered national romanticism through the English folksong and folk dance revival. This movement did not peak until after Barbeau returned to Canada, but an organization called "The Oxford Society of the Revival of the Folk-Dance" was founded in 1908, a year after Barbeau arrived in Oxford.³⁰ No matter how Barbeau came into contact with national romanticism, his writings show that he was strongly influenced by it.

While at Oxford, Barbeau was educated in quite a different intellectual tradition. The early British anthropologists fostered a school of thought that was the antithesis of national romanticism. Scholars sought to maintain scientific objectivity about their work. They were developmentalists who believed that the irrational elements of a cul-

30. Roy Judge, "A Branch of May," *Folk Music Journal*, 2 (1971), p. 91.

ture (which, to their way of thinking, included much folklore) were valuable chiefly for the information they provided about past stages of human development. Developmentalists, however, believed that these irrational elements would and should be discarded as mankind advanced to more rational stages of culture. Revival of such material could only be seen as a step backward and was certainly not to be encouraged.³¹

Barbeau was exposed to English folklore in this developmentalist atmosphere while at Oxford. He later stated

We assisted in 1910 in a realistic representation of "Jack-in-the-Green" an old dance with costume and song which our esteemed professor, Mr. R.R. Marett had performed on his lawns before invited guests at Oxford, England.³²

Jack-in-the-Green is an English May Day custom in which a man dances inside a large wooden frame that is woven with greenery.³³ In contrast to similar demonstrations being staged by folk revivalists at the time, Marett was not interested in Jack-in-the-Green because he wished to see the custom revived. Rather, he was intrigued by the custom because he considered it to be a survival from the time when Druids burned human sacrifices in wicker cages.³⁴

It is apparent that the young Barbeau was educated in the two conflicting intellectual traditions of national romanticism and developmentalism. Obviously, Barbeau could not maintain the stances of both these schools of thought when he began to study folklore. In the study of French-Canadian folklore, Barbeau chose the intellectual approach that had come to him through that culture: that of national romanticism. Barbeau also seems to have been significantly influenced by the nationalism of Henri Bourassa, as I will demonstrate. Nationalism had considerable impact on Barbeau's approach to folklore and may help to account for the emphasis that he placed on national romanticism, in spite of his intellectual training.

-
31. Ellen J. Stekert, "Tylor's Theory of Survivals and the National Romanticism: Their Influence on Early American Folksong Collectors," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 32 (1968), p. 213.
 32. Marius Barbeau and Edouard-Zotique Massicotte, *Veillées du bon vieux temps*, Montreal, G. Ducharme, 1920, p. 4, trans. by Yvan Martineau and Janet McNaughton.
 33. See Roy Judge, *Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom*, The Folklore Society Mistletoe Series, Cambridge, D.A. Brewer Ltd., 1979, for a full discussion of this custom.
 34. Judge, *Jack-in-the-Green*, p. 115.

Around 1914, Barbeau began to direct his attentions to the collection and study of French-Canadian folklore. Barbeau always stated that he had been directed toward the study of French-Canadian material by anthropologist Franz Boas, whom he met at a joint meeting of the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association in 1914.³⁵ That same year, Barbeau began to revitalize the Montreal branch of the American Folklore Society, an organization which would provide him with valuable collaborators.

Barbeau was hired by the National Museum as an anthropologist, and his work was to study native Indian cultures. The collection of French-Canadian folklore was a significant departure from this work, and there are indications that his superiors at the museum were less than enthusiastic about the new direction.³⁶ Under such circumstances, it would have been helpful to Barbeau to be able to refer to the encouragement of Franz Boas, who was a very important anthropologist. In spite of any influence Boas may have had, however, Barbeau's motivations were clearly nationalistic and his nationalism was very much like that of Henri Bourassa.

Barbeau was keenly concerned with promoting an interest in the folk culture of his people among Anglo- as well as Franco-Canadians. In this can be seen a reflection of Bourassa's emphasis on the importance of a vital francophone culture to the whole of Canada. While both Barbeau and Bourassa firmly believed in the importance of French-Canadian culture, they always allowed that English-Canadian culture was of equal value and importance. In 1912 Bourassa stated

the Canadian Confederation. . . is the result of a contract between the two races, French and English, treating on an equal footing and recognizing equal rights and reciprocal obligations.³⁷

Just six years after, in an address given to the American Folklore Society, Barbeau spoke of British, French and Spanish traditions as the "three 'primary sources' of intrusive folk tradition in North America," and stressed the importance of their study.³⁸ Although he was

35. Lacourcière, p. 90.

36. Richard J. Preston, "C. Marius Barbeau and the History of Canadian Anthropology," in *The History of Canadian Anthropology*, ed. Jim Freedman, Proc. of the Canadian Ethnology Society, no. 3, n.p., 1976, p. 130.

37. Cook, p. 150.

38. C. Marius Barbeau, "The Field of European Folk-Lore in America," address of the retiring President, American Folklore Society, 29 December 1918, published in *Journal of American Folklore*, 32 (1919), p. 185.

personally concerned with francophone culture only, he felt that the folklore of Anglo-Canadians was of equal value and, in the same speech, noted with regret the inability of anglophones to recognize and study their own folklore:

Our greatest difficulty in organizing an Ontario Branch of the Folk-Lore Society comes from the refusal of most people to believe that there is any folklore in English Canada....Lack of insight, of course, is the only ground for such a notion.³⁹

There is also evidence that Barbeau adhered closely to the tenets of Bourassa's nationalism regarding European immigration. In the early decades of the twentieth century Canada saw an unprecedented influx of European immigrants who were neither French nor British. Even in Quebec, the vast majority of these immigrants became anglophone, so it is understandable that nationalists in that province might come to regard these people as a direct threat to the status of French-Canadians as a charter ethnic group, and even to the continuance of French-Canadian culture.

While Barbeau was not vocal in the expression of these feelings, there are indications that he shared them. Perhaps the most blatant expression of his concern with European immigration came in the final passage of his book, *Quebec: Where Ancient France Lingers*, published in 1936. Barbeau seems to state that he felt it was too late for a revival of francophone culture in Canada:

Quebec is fast drifting away from its original moorings and accepts its fate complacently. . . .Isolation no longer is a preservative, and vital traditions are becoming dead-letter.⁴⁰

Such pessimism is uncharacteristic of a man who devoted a good deal of his life to the preservation of those traditions. The final line of the book gives some insight into Barbeau's frame of mind, stating "the 'melting pot' is now boiling in the St. Lawrence."⁴¹ The statement would seem to be a thinly veiled reference to the cultural threat posed to French-Canadian culture by European immigration.

Barbeau's approach to folk culture was not entirely in accord with the conservative nationalism of Henri Bourassa. The anti-progress element of this type of nationalism was rejected by Barbeau. In *Quebec, Where Ancient France Lingers* he stated his rationale for wish-

39. Barbeau, "The Field of European Folk-Lore," p. 192.

40. C. Marius Barbeau, *Quebec, Where Ancient France Lingers*, Quebec, Librairie Garneau, 1936, p. 173.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

ing to promote a folk revival in Quebec. "In order to move with the times it is not necessary to sacrifice heredity and tradition, as these very elements are fundamental in national growth and progress abroad."⁴²

The statement would seem to indicate a more sophisticated understanding of national romanticism than is usually found among proponents of folk revival. Johan Gottfried von Herder, the German philosopher who is generally regarded as the originator of national romantic thought, felt that a nation must build upon its folk traditions to move towards a Golden Age of national fulfillment. This progressive aspect of Herder's writings was quickly lost by those most influenced by national romanticism. In Quebec, nationalists commonly regarded the pre-conquest time as their Golden Age. This tendency to romanticize the past and mistrust the future was common among those influenced by national romanticism in Europe as well.

In 1919, Barbeau and a collaborator, Edouard-Zotique Massicotte, staged two concerts in Montreal under the auspices of the Société historique de Montréal to draw attention to the folk music and narratives they had been collecting since 1915.⁴³ Massicotte was an important figure in the folklore studies movement in Quebec at the time. Born in Montreal in 1867, he began collecting folklore in 1883, while still in his teens. As a young man, he worked as a journalist and an actor. In 1911 he was appointed archivist of the judicial district of Montreal. Massicotte met Barbeau in 1917 and, with Barbeau's encouragement, began to collect folklore in earnest. He eventually collected some 5,000 versions of songs and stories, which are housed at the National Museum of Man. He also published a number of articles on the folklore of Quebec. It was apparently Massicotte's idea to stage the 1919 concerts.

The extent of popular interest in folklore at the time is demonstrated by the fact that the one concert that was originally planned attracted so many people that a second event was staged a few weeks later. In 1920 Barbeau wrote a commemorative pamphlet for these "Veillées du bon vieux temps" in which he clearly stated his dedication to national romanticism. Barbeau felt that art was stagnating in Quebec because artists scorned their own culture, preferring to imitate the art of France. He likened this to the situation in Germany when

42. *Ibid.*

43. See Janet McNaughton, "Marius Barbeau and the 'Veillées du bon vieux temps,'" *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*, 18:2 (1984), 7-9, for an account of these events.

national romantic thought had first developed:

...like in Germany at the time of the Grimms or more recently in France the candor of the texts or things of the people revolt those whose spirits languish in a bookish atmosphere or in the stuffy air of the salons of good families.⁴⁴

It is clear that Barbeau saw his role in Canada to be similar to that of the Grimms in Germany. One of the stated purposes of the concerts was to keep francophone folklore alive by inspiring artists to turn their attentions to the expressive culture of rural Quebec as a source of inspiration. He stated,

some of our scholars would win the laurel which escapes them if they could consider without prejudice the varied themes which are offered to them in their own country instead of reiterating universal platitudes. Was it not apropos to point out [in these concerts] to these exiled spirits the unexplored poetic or melodic riches for the people from which they come and to whom they would best return?⁴⁵

In the twenties, Barbeau continued to actively promote folk revival through his involvement in the CPR-sponsored folk festivals which were held at the Château Frontenac in 1927 and 1928. During the festivals, an active attempt was made to encourage both anglophone and francophone composers to base compositions on themes from French-Canadian folk music. The 1928 festival was too ambitious in scope and poorly organized, and when it was over, Barbeau decided that it would be more profitable for him "to remain in the peaceful atmosphere of my own work, which gives me more satisfaction."⁴⁶ From that time on, Barbeau was less interested in promoting folk revival, although his approach to French-Canadian folklore was always influenced by national romanticism and the political nationalism of Henri Bourassa.

Throughout his long career Barbeau continued to write prolifically about French-Canadian folk culture. He also encouraged younger francophone scholars to collect and analyze folklore. In 1944, a chair in folklore was established at Laval University and the position was filled by Luc Lacourcière, one of Barbeau's disciplines. In 1945 Barbeau too joined the Faculty of Letters at Laval. It was largely through Barbeau's efforts to create awareness and understanding of French-

44. Barbeau and Massicotte, p. 2.

45. *Ibid.*

46. C. Marius Barbeau, letter to J.M. Gibbon, 16 April 1942. Barbeau Correspondence, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, National Museum of Man, Ottawa.

Canadian folk culture that this academic department of folklore, the first in North America, was established.

After World War I, the dream of a bicultural Canada seemed increasingly distant, and the apex of Henri Bourassa's power passed in the mid-twenties. The new leader of nationalist forces in Quebec was historian Abbé Lionel Groulx. He was a conservative separatist whose works stressed "the mystical separateness of French-Canadians, [and] his nationalism was characterized by a strong religious and messianic flavour."⁴⁷ Barbeau was little influenced by this new separatist nationalism, unless his work can be seen as a reaction against it. He remained a nationalist in the same vein as Bourassa; acknowledging the equal importance of the two charter cultures in Canada. His many popular and scholarly writings on French-Canada published in English can be seen, in part, as an effort to encourage a greater understanding and appreciation of francophone culture among anglophone Canadians.

Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

47. Cook, p. 103.