

An Acadian Heritage

from the Saint John River Valley



by A. J. Michaud

A. J. MICHAUD

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from the
St. John River Valley**

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This book is dedicated

To
My granddaughters
And to
My adopted grandson
Le Petit Robert

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Foreword

These few pages have been taken from different causeries published in the St. John Valley Times under the aegis of the Madawaska Historical Society. They are not a complete compilation. They were chosen as an answer to a question asked by a Maine poet in the 'long ago': "This is the forest primeval; but where are the hearts that beneath it leaped like the roe when he hears in the woodland the voice of the huntsman?"

Nearly two hundred years ago thirteen Acadian families came up the St. John River from Ste. Anne des Pays Bas and began opening up another forest primeval. After wandering over the whole Atlantic seaboard for thirty years their English lords and masters had finally promised them land grants. They were the first to settle this northern part of the State of Maine. A few years later other French speaking families from the shores of the St. Lawrence River joined them.

During these two centuries a certain definite culture has evolved that is wholly different from other groups of French origin found in this country. Its language was (and may still be) a living language and as such it added, changed the meanings of words according to the exigencies of agricultural pursuits, modern technology and religious beliefs.

The following pages do not claim to tell the whole story, just a minimal part of it. They have been written because the valley has been the home of my ancestors for over a hundred years and because I have loved it ever since I saw the light of day.

The photographs for the cover were taken by my son James. A great debt is owed to the owner of the "Times", Whitey Rahrig, for letting the Madawaska "Territory" Historical Society express its ideals and its findings in a weekly column. How can one thank Mrs. Kay Higgins, a newcomer to but a lover of the valley, who contributed the sketches to enliven the format of this booklet? To the many friends, too numerous to name, who have given me the ideas for these articles, I say a heartfelt Thank You.

A. J. Michaud

Nov. 1, 1972

Purpose of the Madawaska 'Territory' Historical Society

**"L'histoire est la mémoire des siècles immortalisée... un peuple
qui n'a pas dicté la sienne n'est pas encore né."**

(Lacordaire)

We of the Madawaska 'Territory' Historical Society are very conscious of the above quotation. During our centennial year we have tried to encourage our members to contribute diverse aspects of our past history, of our fast-disappearing culture.

All cultures are in a stage of flux. As they cover all phases of human achievements as well as human beliefs and intellectual attainments, outside influences, stronger or more pervasive than themselves, will drastically change them if not totally destroy them. The historical record is there to prove this statement... from the death of the culture of Babylon to the moribund stage of our own Acadian culture. All that we can hope to do is to keep a record of our ancestors' beliefs, their customs, their legends which they brought with them from Europe. We are part of a greater nation and we cannot hope to assimilate it.

The tales of "p'tit Jean" (les contes de nos pères) that filled our young imaginations on a cold blizzardly winter night have been replaced by the inane humor of "Get Smart," the witchery of Samantha, and the monotony of "Mission Impossible." When the old folks predicted dire catastrophies at the appearance of Halley's comet in 1910... just prior to the first World War... were they more credulous than we are when we attach so much importance to Mrs. J. Dixon's or Dr. A. Tanous' predictions? Were they or could they not be psychic too?

They interpreted dreams in the best of fashion of Joseph from Biblical times and they were not worse in their superstitions than the millions of Americans who spend billions in consulting their horoscope. Many of us along the valley will open up our morning paper and search our astro-cast for the day.

An extensive study of the old folks' weather forecasting proves them surprisingly correct. The leisure time was there for them to study nature and interpret its

various moods. If hens at the falling of the first rain drops ran for shelter, it meant it would only be a shower; if they stayed in the rain... a whole day's drizzle. If one could interpret the hundred and one weather signs that they followed, one would be more correct than the Dorval or the Caribou weather stations. Try them some day.

Our old culture is disappearing... this can not be helped... a record of it can be kept though. The best traits of the Acadian character should be preserved too... the honesty, the stubborn love of religion and family, the complete integrity of character of these people should continue to be part of the family lore of the valley. To assure their continuity and their preservation let our churches' doors be kept open.

If it is possible to teach more French in our schools without losing too much "STATE MONEY," let it come back to our curriculum. Let it come back not as an archaic language but as close to the French that is spoken today as it is scholastically possible with the few teachers that we have. I think that our children although they may say "A va venir à matin pas à soir" would easily understand "Elle viendra ce matin non pas ce soir." 'A' was still used for "elle" in some districts of Normandy in the early part of the century. Examples like the above can be given ad infinitum.

Masses should continue to be said in French if the language is taught in school. It is pitiful to attend some masses in the valley and hear the couple next to you read the somewhat unfamiliar words of an English mass. I'm sure that my knuckles may be rapped for some of the above statements but let the person who will do the rapping remember that I am making them because I would want some of this culture to remain for another generation or so if not for a longer period of time. It has existed for one hundred and eighty-five years... can't the hope be expressed that some shreds of it exist a little longer?



Lutins

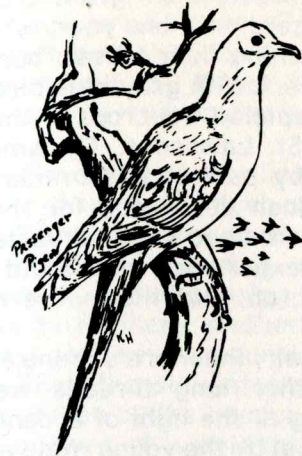
What elfin, intangible creatures you are when one is five! You stand about a foot high with your feet firmly set in a horse's mane, riding the nights away when the winds knock at the frost-encrusted windows of the farm house. You always choose the coldest nights to try your skills of horsemanship. You must be accomplished hair dressers to braid your mount's manes in such delicate intricate patterns.

What prompted you to come last night out of the great unknown? Did you come on some great gust of wind? Or did you fall from the star-lit sky? The moon was coming over the eastern hill when I scraped the frost from the window pane... safe and snug in the flannelette nightgown... standing close to the kitchen stove. Was I really looking for you last night? Or are you just figments of my imagination? Still you must exist for this morning when my big brothers took me to the barn to look at our old mare, her mane was all braided, her hair wet with perspiration. Had she not raced all night? Yet I never see you in the light of day. Are you just creatures of the night? Will I never see you?

Mes petits lutins I am not afraid of you as I am of the loup garou and all the people who race in the sky and take part in the "Chasse Galerie." It seems to me that you must laugh like I do, run like I do. If you only live at night and I in the daytime, why can't we meet some day at twilight in the realms of make-believe? You could tell me where you spend your days and I could find you... especially when I play hide and seek in the orchard. I have not yet explored the corner where the gooseberries grow. There is also a great patch of wild roses on the edge. Could you be hiding there? Would the bumblebees that go from flower to flower

bring you honey for food? The apple trees are so tall, could you be sleeping on the highest branches?

My eyes are becoming blurry. It is night again. Must I always go to sleep when you are just awakening? Bonsoir... mes petits lutins.



Tourterelles

It is an undisputed fact that birds have affected life in the Valley. They have been the subject of many of the superstitions that the anthropologists or psychologists have accused us of. The people of the Valley are deeply superstitious in nearly everything that touches bird-life and lore. Bird behavior has been studied so closely that the knowledge derived from this study has guided our forefathers in their rush to salvage hay or any other farm work. It helped them decide whether they should stick around the farm for the day or go to town or whether they should fear for the safety of their barn during severe electrical storms. They have always been a source of protein to their diet during all seasons. The word protein was unknown to them as it had been unknown for millions of years. Modern science invented it when America became a nation of fatsos. The subject of birds and their importance in the history of the Valley is part of my recollection when my great grandparents came to settle in the rear lots of this Valley.

The tall maples and beech trees were cut and burnt. A lean-to and then a log cabin were set up. The bred cow soon gave birth to a bull calf; the sow to a litter of pigs; the rooster and the five hens more than produced a hundredfold of their specie; the potash from the ashes of the burnings gave the young folks grain crops that they never could hope to harvest from the depleted left-over lots that they could have bought from the shores of the St. Lawrence River.

In the midst of these vast forests their grain crops were bountiful for two or three years until one year, when they were cutting and hand-bunching their wheat, buck-wheat and oats the sky became dark with gray blue birds, the curse that had sometimes depleted the crops of their parents along the shores of the St. Lawrence. The small grain fields were soon spotted by part of this immense flock and about five thousand soon descended for their evening meal on the wheat that remained to be harvested.

The young couple knew from experience what could be done to preserve part of their crop. But they were not prepared for this emergency.

The young wife cut her long hair, the mare's mane and tail-hair were also cut. No other long threads were available. During all the evening at the light of a candle nets were woven from this material by the young male and female. Then every scrap of small lead, iron, and sand, even, that could be pounded into a gun charge were prepared for the first light at dawn.

This was the month of September. There still remained four hours to rest. All possible preparations had been finished. Four frames had been made with lengths of light mountain ash on which the nets of horse as well as human hair had been attached. These were taken and set amidst the bundles of wheat with a trap-post holding up one end. The two guns and the rest of the extemporized ammunition brought unto the edge of the field where there remained a thick growth of hazel bushes. The setting of the nets had for a moment raised the immense flock of birds but these normally would soon return and really destroy the whole crop.

The young couple had not long to wait. These birds knew no fear. They seemed to feel a certain safety in their number.

They were hungry and they had found a source of food in their great migration to the south.

They were soon circling overhead. The sky was dark like the coming of a summer storm or so it seemed to the young people. Their winter's supply of white flour was at stake.

As soon as the main portion of the flock had alighted and walked under the nets, the trap poles were pulled. Down went the nets. So full were they that the simultaneous moving of the wings of the birds partially lifted the frames and a few birds escaped. Then the guns

were discharged in the direction of the field that had been left uncovered by nets. Ten or fifteen would tumble down as each buckshot charge would reach the rising and landing of the flock. It took over an hour before the migration sensed that it was not safe to try to find a meal in the small field.

The crop had been half saved. Now there remained the chore of saving as much of the meat as it was possible.

There was not much salt on hand.

First the noonday meal of fresh meat. Ten were skinned like fur-bearing animals. There was not time to save the feathers. Washed, they were put to boil, seasoned, a few potatoes and turnips added.

Then the slaughtering began in earnest. The birds were taken by the head, a fast twist given, the head would sever, the body would fall in a pile on the pole-type dray that the ox could pull to the spring near the cabin.

Skinned, eviscerated, washed, the birds were placed on a layer of salt at the bottom of a crock. This process was continued until the crocks were full.

Many were hung in a temporary smokehouse improvised before the permanent smokehouse could be built for the fall butchering.

Enough birds were hung on the walls of the springhouse for the following day's meals. The rest of the birds that had been shot as well as the entrails of those that had been salvaged were brought to the sow and her weaned shoats. Nothing was wasted.

These were my great grandmother's famous 'fourterelles.'

The birds would continue to come for three more generations. A few might be caught in the spring when the birds stopped to eat in newly harrowed fields where the crude instruments of the time had not covered all seed grain.

The spring flocks were never as numerous as the fall ones. The birds were also more wary. My great grandparents might only catch enough to make a few pot pies.

Some years the whole area would be bypassed in the spring. But as the years added more cleared land to the area, the fall migrations would even be larger than the first ones that they had seen.

The settlers were better prepared to catch them and a winter supply of the dark-fleshed birds was an expected yearly crop.

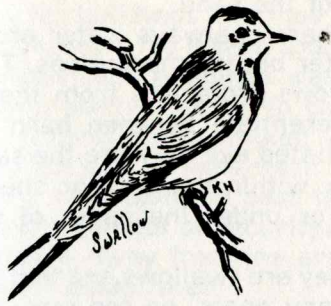
Towards the end of the nineteenth century these birds had totally disappeared as a source of food. Just a few could be seen on the edge of woods. And then there were no more.

At the beginning of the twentieth century these incredible flocks of birds that darkened the sky had become stuff that tales are made of.

Their delicacy, the beauty of their flight, their unexpected arrival, the holiday spirit that pervaded the few days that the bounty of their flesh contributed to the table added a certain aura to a winter's tale on cold nights when snow was drifting and the wind seemed to shake parts of the house.

It felt good to be secure in your father's arms. Although replete from the evening's meal, one could still enjoy these great banquets of the past.

Grandmère's 'tourterelles' were no other than the extinct passenger pigeons.



Swallows

Swallows... and they better be with us if all insecticides are banned!

All superlative adjectives pertaining to beauty can be applied to swallows. Some have patches of blue that surpass the blues of the grottoes of Capri. The browns are a reminder of the coming browns of an autumnal landscape, the white of a virgin's purity.

Its flight is purposeful, is always graceful however erratic its course, cunning in its dexterity at catching its prey as it arises on its birth flight from the surface of any body of water.

If it were not for the tree, the cliff and barn swallows, this Valley would not be fit to live in for three months out of the year nor would any other place in the United States be.

This diminutive three-ounce body of blood, energy, rapaciousness, ferocity, fearlessness is a godsend to us.

If a tree swallow should build its nest near your home, let your cat beware after the swallow's young are hatched. It knows no fear when it comes to protect them. It will even attack you.

There is no hope for the family cat.

The cliff swallow is somewhat more aloof. It chooses old sandpits. It seems to sense that people will not disturb the area for the period that it will take to lay its eggs, hatch its brood, and have them ready to depart before humans decide to come in for a load of gravel. It is one of the first comers to the area.

If food is scarce in ordinary insects, it will find moths and minor butterflies to supplement its diet.

Like all swallows it loves company. An abandoned sandpit or a riverbank that has not eroded for several years may see as many as 200 of their nests... small holes

dug in the very tenderness of the sand.

Sandpits, riverbanks... there is always water around where swallows abound. Water breeds mosquitoes. Their varieties are millions. Swallows protect us from them.

Some ornithologists differentiate between barn and eaves swallows. To the uninitiated eye they are the same. They build their nests either within the barn or shed or garage or any old building or under the eaves of such buildings.

All that matters is that they are swallows and that they will protect you from as many gnats, no-see-ems, long legged thunderbirds that may invade your room in the wilds or any flying insect that your imagination can conceive. An insect consumed June 1st means a million less by August 15.

How swallows became involved in the superstitions of the valley should become part of a master's thesis on ornithology.

First of all their coming is a romantic encounter. One morning there is only the rather foolish robin pecking at patches of bare ground in the spring. Crows have long been cawing about the sky and feeding from our town dumps. Starlings and grackles with their iridescent feathers awake us every morning.

And then one day in June the swallows are here and woe the year that they may be late a few days for Maine's blackfly will have taken over. One never realizes that these birds have travelled over 10,000 miles to come to live with us.

One week at the end of August there may be millions on telephone lines and electric conduits. Their flight may extend to September and then they are no more. But there are no more mosquitoes either.

Their coming and going do not form any of the lore of the Valley but its people have always considered themselves fortunate to see the barn or eaves swallows come and build their home in and about their buildings.

They enjoyed watching these small birds spend days in masoning their nests of mud and dried grass. They understood this frenzied activity of the birds to build and to reproduce. It was their own way of life.

The same birds seemed to come every year to take over their old homes. If cold had loosened part of them they would just be repaired. Fresh feathers and dried bits

of grass would only be added.

As the buildings that they used for their nests seemed to last forever, the legend soon began that their nesting in and about such buildings was a sign of good luck. Such buildings seemed never to be destroyed by lightning or fire. Animals being milked about such buildings were always quieter. (There were less flies).

And so it came to pass that the nest of the swallow became a symbol of security. Even the old she-cat kept her kittens away from the area. The cult of the swallow was soon established.

One of the first things that a child was taught was never to destroy a swallow's nest for it might bring bad luck. By extension of belief all birds' nests became semi-sacred in the minds of children.

The wonder of what went on in those nests was always a goad to our imagination and an older sister or brother would set a ladder near the nests so that we could see the inside with its eggs and, later, with the many wide mouths. But we always were careful never to touch the eggs for we believed that the mother would not sit on them anymore if we did and it would have been nearly a sin to think of destroying them.

The Romans had their sacred geese. The Parent Settlements settled for the swallow.



Common Birds

The years have gone by and much of the lore of the old folks has been forgotten.

They could read weather signs from the sky because they took the time to look up at the sky. Its cloud formations could give them indications of what the weather would be like the following day if not a week's forecast.

They were much better than present day radio announcers within their curtain-shrouded rooms when they report rain although the sun is shining brilliantly outside.

When the setting sun's rays would be covering the left hand side of the horizon, the old folks would not worry about taking in their half-dried hay the following day. But let this same light be on the right of the setting sun... no matter how beautiful the sunset might be, one was certain that the sky would be overcast the following day.

However, birds have been the subject of the previous lines and the study of their behavior added corroboration to our people's prognostications. If swallows were flying high, it meant that there would not be much rain.

The old mare could be harnessed and that postponed trip to town could be made to refill a depleted larder of such necessities as salt and spices. As the hay or grain would be humid, no field work could be done.

Some days it began to rain but the hens would stay outside and walk about scratching for food. One would hear on such occasions: "We'll get a good wetting if we go to town. We'd better fix that broken harness and repair the plow for the fall plowing. It will rain all day."

And sure enough it would. Hens knew that they could not afford to run for shelter and fill their crops on such a day.

If a bird should enter a house and die therein, it was an ill omen, an omen of death. A great effort would be made to catch it and put it outside. It was not an infrequent happening for screen doors were a luxury and were unknown for a great many years before the advent of the railroad. It was not uncommon for birds to find their way inside a house.

With the high birthrate and high child death rate this superstition could very well have been developed by several coincidences. People's minds could dwell on local

happenings, compare them, and draw conclusions from them.

Deaths were frequent but they were one by one. Facts, fore-happenings, actualities, after consequences could be talked about, analysed, and the cause could be discussed, and final conclusions drawn.

With our news of 100,000 deaths from some tidal wave, the havoc of typhoons, tornadoes, we can only say that nature is stronger than we are with all our scientific know-how. We don't even attribute it to a superior being.

We even rush blankets, the all-American blanket, the same one that we gave to the Indians infested with small-pox germs so that we could exterminate them. Yes... we do rush blankets and beef to people of East Pakistan who do not eat cow-meat as they consider that animal sacred.



Tanager

1914 was a dramatic year in the Parent Settlements. Snow had fallen every week since the beginning of November. The month of January had brought drifts higher than the house.

The barn was something that was lying beyond our sight. My brothers had tunnelled a path for sleds and the horse to go through from their domain and ours. It was a green blue world to walk through. (Of course it might not have been that high. It might have been just so-high. I was only five or six).

All of a sudden the rains came. A small rivulet, a paddle-mill was built for such small fry as I. And then we

were in the month of May. It was green everywhere. Lilacs were pushing their buds. Apple trees were in bloom. All the lush growth of an early spring had changed the landscape.

A sudden turn in the weather. The wind moaned all night. And when we woke up the following morning, the shrubs with their leaves no larger than a mouse's ears were covered with snow.

The snow, of course, under a brilliant sun was melting but what was this bird on the rosebush near the orchard that brought the attention of the whole household? It was an event. It had never been seen before in these parts.

Of course my oldest sister who had gone to school had talked of these birds but we really up to then had thought that they were figments of her imagination. But there it was sitting on our own rosebush. It had to be a sign of unheard of, portentous events.

Something awful, something bloody as it was as red as the blood of the yearling pigs slaughtered the previous fall had been.

The snow melted. Spring continued to be warm. Seeds went into the ground. We waited to see what would happen. World War I began! Halley's comet had given a previous warning. This would be the year. (This bird must have been a tanager).



Blue Jay

For ages and ages to a four year old a bird stood out as a mythical and mystic symbol.

At that period of life time is relative. It is not chopped up in minutes or months or years.

Life is made up of sensations, series of impressions, nuzzlings in a woman's lap, manly smells of a father's sweat and tobacco smoke.

It is the kissing away of pain from a bruised knee when one tripped over a rock in the rush to investigate the unusual cacklings of a barnyard uproar.

It is the scratching of the first hoarfrost on a windowpane. It can be a half hour or it can be hours listening to a winter's tale.

For ages this bird had been described. It could not exist in my world. It stole diamonds that it placed in its nest.

The light of the sun would touch these precious stones and keep the eggs warm when the mother bird was away.

When its young were hatched, it fed them with the eyes of other young birds and it would also bring in their brains for extra tidbits. With such delicate fare the nestlings would grow inordinately beautiful and fast.

Their feathers could soon acquire the blue of the sky of a summer's afternoon and as it also had some white feathers these would compare to the purity of a first snowfall.

Its diet of other birds' brain had made them very intelligent. No gun could ever kill them.

This bird had become the greatest weather forecaster for when its cry of pweeitpwee which sounded to our French ears like pluie. (In fact we never pronounce the "l" and say puie) The sun would soon disappear behind a vast overcast and we would have a long, continuous rain.

In the fall when frost would cover the ground and a warm reddish sun would try to melt it, if the cry of the blue jay was heard, one could predict that a change of wind would come during the night and that the ground would be covered with snow the next morning.

Even now after a hundred years it has retained its uncanny powers of weather forecasting if one will only take the time to listen to it.

The blue of its plumage is still the blue of the sky. No

Renaissance painter when painting the blue mantle of the Virgin has been able to surpass its ethereal beauty.

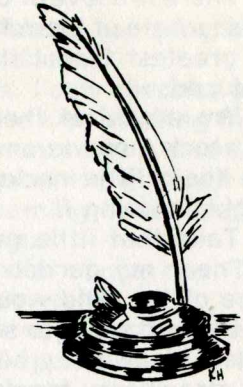
Modern ornithologists have nearly exonerated the blue jay of its criminal habits but it was pleasurable to read that the remains of a young bird had been found in the crop of one blue jay. So that proved that my parents' tales without the wherewithal of a modern laboratory had not misjudged this beautiful criminal of our forests.

It is not a bird of passage. It has adopted the Valley and its surroundings as its home. For him there is no southern migration at the first indication of cold weather.

It was here in 1785. If the Madawaska Historical Society would want a bird as a symbol of its continuity, its vitality, its endurance in the face of rough weather, the blue jay should be considered. The State may have its chickadee, but who pays attention to this minute bird in the summer? It is never heard nor ever seen. The blue jay is a bird for all seasons.



To friends with birds in my belfry



Dear friends:

It has been a long time since I wrote and the only thing I feel like writing about is birds. Yet this is right in the middle of winter when there are no birds about.

I don't see why the epithet 'bird-brain' indicates lack of gray matter when applied to people. Birds, at least, have enough of it to go down where there is plenty of food and where the thermometer doesn't hover below zero for half of the day.

The great urge to think and talk about birds at this time of the year may be compared to the universal habit of leafing through a garden seed catalogue when you first pull it out of your mailbox some frigid January morning. It opens up vistas that the short cold days of December had obliterated from your memory.

Our own human weakness may also be the cause of it all. Scarcity of anything will prompt it to yearn for what is not.

It is also part of my own makeup to appreciate the warmth of a summer day when it is 40 below outside. And so it came to pass that the monotony of just seeing the ubiquitous sparrow made me wish to write during the past few weeks about swallows and passenger pigeons and our very own self-educated partridge.

Needless to say that it was a labor of love this travelling through several generations. I tried to find the truth or the source of many supposed superstitious beliefs that my people have about birds.

The superstitions turned out to be the result of long observations of bird behavior and the consequent weather forecasts proved more correct than modern prophets.

at it again, eating away at my bountiful Farm Journal report.

To think that those birds were imported from England! England could not conquer the Colonies but it sent the starlings to do so and also shatter the pride of an old Acadian lover along the St. John River.

And so we have crows. These are considered pests in many parts of this nation. Over here we consider them harbingers of spring, much more so than the robin.

First they come earlier than the robins do. Forty days after their coming, we know that spring will be here.

Their travels from the river to the back settlements control our weather. Their cawing on a clear morning will mean, first of all, that you're wide awake but, much more important, that the sun will shine all day, that you can open up those tired eyes and greet the light of a newborn day and revel in its beauty.

To me the crow is the most wonderful bird of them all. It has all the best attributes of "birddom." I look up to him as to an older brother.

This affinity to the crow might be due to reading at a tender age La Fontaine's fable of the crow and the fox. But La Fontaine used the words "corbeau et le renard." At that time when I was knee-high corbeau and renard meant corneil et renard. At seven or eight we do not cavil with terminology.

Even now ravens may be confused by ordinary people with the crow (Crows, as the people say, that have forgotten to go south).

Blackbirds... what pests! Alfred Hitchcock never dreamt how obnoxious birds could be. Of course the American public shivered when it saw them attack one of their own kind, but what should one do when they destroy the very essence of survival like a crop of sweet corn in the month of May? As soon as a shoot comes up, a blackbird is there to pull it and eat the tender grain... Grr...

And so my friends... the evening is ended. Except for snow-plows going by, I haven't heard another car drive by all evening and we have passed the witching hour of midnight. This blizzard started in the State of Washington and has gone over the Great Lakes, but it is dying off over our hills. Everyone is asleep and safe.

Meals tomorrow will be: Luncheon... pea soup with leek herbs, sliced carrots, celery and a salad of canned salmon. Dinner will consist of broiled steak, baked

potatoes, frozen corn that the blackbirds left last spring, raspberry tarts that birds don't seem to ever touch and that's life along the St. John^s River.

Sincerely with birds in my belfry.



Ballads,

Balladists,

Complaintes



A "complainte" is a tragic or plaintive ballad or as Larousse would define it... chanson populaire sur quelque sujet tragique ou pieux.

In the early 1900's the ballad was a very popular form of evening entertainment particularly in large family gatherings or groups of adults from a large section of a "Concessions." Fortunate was the child of five at whose home such a gathering took place. He made himself very small and was very quiet to escape the eyes of his parents so that he could listen to these ever enchanting episodes. Sometimes an older person would take out his or her handkerchief to wipe away a tear during the most tragic or sad passage of the ballad. Rarely would such songs be sung when the family would be alone. They were kept for large gatherings.

During the winter evenings the raconteur of the family would entertain the children with tales or 'contes' of "P'tit Jean," "Le Palais de Justice," or the fearful doings of "La Chasse Galerie"... travels through the cold winter nights of people who had sold their soul to the devil. The outside

at it again, eating away at my bountiful Farm Journal report.

To think that those birds were imported from England! England could not conquer the Colonies but it sent the starlings to do so and also shatter the pride of an old Acadian lover along the St. John River.

And so we have crows. These are considered pests in many parts of this nation. Over here we consider them harbingers of spring, much more so than the robin.

First they come earlier than the robins do. Forty days after their coming, we know that spring will be here.

Their travels from the river to the back settlements control our weather. Their cawing on a clear morning will mean, first of all, that you're wide awake but, much more important, that the sun will shine all day, that you can open up those tired eyes and greet the light of a newborn day and revel in its beauty.

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world came to our young minds in variegated forms and our imaginations fed on the goings of kings, or giants, of mythic 'lutins,' of evil souls and devils as well as saints and angels. It was grand to be young in those days.

There were many favorite ballads that are still known. The longest and best known is that of the "Wandering Jew" (La Complainte du Juif-Errant). There are twenty-four stanzas. The author is unknown to us. It will be placed in the archives of the Madawaska Historical Society with many others. The first stanza is as follows:

Est-il rien sur la terre
Qui soit plus surprenant
Que la grande misère
Du pauvre juif-errant?
Que son sort malheureux
Paraît triste et facheux!

Another ballad that was quite well known in the St. Agatha district is that of a young man who became lost in the woods and froze to death. The title is "La complainte du gelé." A study of the rhymes and grammar in this one would indicate a local balladist. Most of the local ballads are sung either to the tune of the "Wandering Jew" or to a stranger and yet a very well known one... the "Dies Irae" from the mass of the dead!

If there were ballads to be sung in a plaintive, haunting voice, there were singers to sing them... voices that could be heard from fields a half a mile away; voices that floated from a lake at twilight... the singer too distant to be seen. Even the song of the birds seemed to be hushed at the melody that came forth out of these human throats.

There seemed to be great singers in every section of the Valley and their memory lingers on. One of these still is very much alive at 78 and it has given me great pleasure to record the remains of his once glorious voice. This exceptional singer's name is Mr. Donat Michaud of St. Agatha. His sister, Ozité, was also similarly gifted. Both were very much in demand in all local entertainments and were the backbone of the church choir for three generations.

In Grand Isle there were Léonard Doucette and Cyprien Chassé who have long disappeared from the Valley but the memory of their wonderful voices lingers on. They enlivened many evenings in lumber camps by

their gift of song and the lives of these lonesome men were cheered by their voices... voices that could bring up the faces of the beloved, the 'gaillardise' of the tavern, or the separation of a father from his family. Mr. Chassé's voice had somewhat diminished in the late thirties but there could not be a parish veillée in Grand Isle without Mr. Chassé's rendition of "Souvenirs d'un vieillard."

In the Parent and Grivois settlements the voice of Alexis Parent should be noted. There must have been others along the Valley just as worthy as the ones just mentioned but my collection of old songs so far has been confined to Grand Isle, Madawaska, and St. Agatha.

Most of these persons could easily have earned their living by means of their talent but they sang for the pleasure of singing and the enjoyment of their friends. Couldn't these lines from Gray's Elegy be applied to their memory?

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen... And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

In nearly every collection of songs found along the Valley many have proved their popularity by appearing in almost all copybooks.

The most popular so far has been one that was sung by the bride at the wedding banquet after the marriage ceremony. It began "Aura Dieu père... Aura Dieu Mère." A better example of the sentimentality or melancholy... la tristesse du pays... the 'fado' of Portugese songs... can not be found. To be truly happy one had to cry before the festivities.

The second song given today is written by P.C. François, S.M., about 1895. "Il y a du Lamartine ici." The third is "Gauloise" as it represents all the elements of the wit of the people, the "clin d'oeil" that Acadians will have at any pretentiousness, and of course it was written or sung in the "langue de la vallée" or accent or language or patois (depending whether one belongs to Pace, Title VII, or one is an anthropologist). It is autochthonous to the river.

As Mrs. Arthur Levesque sang it for me the night before she paralyzed, I knew that I had found what I had been looking for these many months. The word autochthonous is used to delight the educated elements of our population. Personally I have a 'horrendous terror' of all words derived from Greek.

A word of appreciation for the courtesy and help given me in compiling this collection of old songs to Mrs. George Pozzuto and her mother, Mrs. Xavier Dufour, Mr. and Mrs. Neil Levesque, Mr. and Mrs. Archie Hébert, Mr. and Mrs. Levite F. Cyr, Miss Marie Mae Martin, Mrs. Dan Cyr, Mrs. Victor Albert, Mrs. Emily McClinchey, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Dubé, Mrs. Juliette Albert, all of Madawaska; Mrs. Saul Michaud of Lewiston; Mr. and Mrs. Donat Michaud as well as their son Jack from St. Agatha and Mr. Sylvio Michaud.

Also, to the whole town of Grand Isle... and more particularly to Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Parent, Mrs. Dorice Cyr, Mrs. Romule Dumond, to Mr. and Mrs. Octave Caron... the incomparable Octave... Mrs. Abel H. Levesque, Mrs. Jane Cyr, Mrs. Viola Corbin, Mr. Oneil Soucy, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Sanfaçon; to two voices who want to remain anonymous; to Mrs. Herbie Cyr of Van Buren; and to the many others who have promised me more recordings like Mr. Simeon Doucette who has given his time to the historical society in playing the violin. This long list does not begin to name the people who have helped me.

WEDDING SONG

Oh! adieu père... Oh! adieu mère...
Oh! adieu tous mes bons parents.
Je vais vous quitter aujourd'hui.
Je vais vous quitter pour long temps.

REFRAIN

Car si je prends un bon mari
C'est pour avoir de l'agrément
Non! jamais j'oublierai le bon temps
Que j'ai passé auprès de mes bons parents.
Nous voilà tous mis à la table
Tous à la table rassemblés
Quand je regarde ma tendre mère
Les larmes qui coulent des yeux.
Oh! adieu père... Oh! adieu mère.
Oh! adieu donc pleurez pas tant.
Je reviendrai encore vous voir.
Ce sera avec mon fidèle amant.

Quand je regarde la porte
Moi qui la fermais si souvent
Je vais la fermer aujourd'hui.
Je vais la fermer pour longtemps.

LA RIVIERE ST-JEAN

Je vois dans ton onde rapide
Se refléter les moissons, les forêts,
Ainsi dans une âme limpide,
Je vois de Dieu se refléter les traits.

REFRAIN

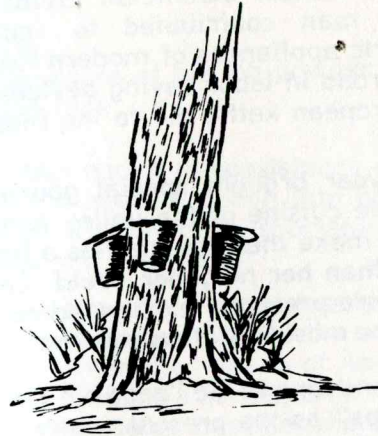
Salut! Salut! douce rivière,
Aux flots sans bruit, au rivage riant,
Un peuple heureux, l'âme légère,
Tout près de toi s'égaré en travaillant.
Flots, retardez votre voyage;
Ici, les fleurs, l'air pur, la liberté,
Des gais enfants, le babillage,
Font oublier les bruits de la cité.
J'ai visité les belles ruines
Des grands châteaux accoudés au rocher;
J'aime mieux mes vertes collines,
Mon Van Buren, Mon St. Jean, Mon clocher.
Soyez béni, céleste Père,
Qui sur ces bords avez mis mon berceau,
Que les flots purs de ma rivière
Viennent un jour caresser mon tombeau.

The following song was sung by Mrs. Arthur Levesque,
Oct. 1970

C'est le long de la rivière St. Jean
Qui sont tous des gros habitants.
Ils mangent du pain d'avoine,
Du gros lard et d'la grosse couaine...
Oh! cependant ça fait rire tous ces jeunes gens. (bis)

Les filles sont fières pour se farder
Mais elles n'ont rien de quoi z'a manager.
Vous les voyez tous les dimanches,
Leurs chapeaux garnis d'plumage.
Oh! cependant, ça fait rire tous ces jeunes gens... (bis)

Vous les voyez dans la grande alée...
Elles ont toutes le ventre 'ertiré'
Elles se disent tout bas à l'oreille
Oh! grand Dieu, que je suis faible...
Oh! cependant, s'appuyant 'desur' les bancs... (bis)
Si le bedeau venait à passer
Du pain béni ou en 'smuggler.'
Ils disent que l'année prochaine va être pire...
Oh! grand Dieu qu'le ventre 'métire' ...
Oh! cependant, les plumages sacreront leur 'quant.'



Maple Sugar Recipes

The discovery of maple sugar by the American Indian is obscured in the annals of time. Only imagination can guess as to how and by whom the first sweet droppings were tasted.

Could a tomahawk have missed its mark in the spring of the year and hit a maple tree and when pulled out, the sweet sap started to trickle out? The heat of the sun evaporated the excess water, leaving a residue that attracted squirrels, deer, and porcupines.

Perhaps a child tasted what seemed to attract these animals, and he found it good. He called his mother or an older sister and they too found it pleasant to their taste like a certain something that made raspberries and blueberries so desirable later in the summer.

The Indians noted the time of year when certain trees would produce this sweet water. It was only after the sun had heated it up for several days that it became sweet, but the primitive Indian in this district had no other means of boiling water than by immersing hot stones into his white birch bark container.

It was only after the Basque and Portugese fishermen came to the shores of Canada in search of the oil of the whale and the flesh of the cod that the Indians began to acquire from them kettles in which meat and sap could be boiled. The white man could ask any number of pelts for an iron kettle and for a gun after the power of that thunder stick became known.

The iron kettle was the most beneficial, civilizing artifact that the white man contributed to Indian civilization. (All the electric appliances of modern times have not made such an inroad in labor saving devices to modern "man" as the European kettle did to the Indian squaw).

Every season of the year brought special gourmet dishes to the rude primitive cuisine of the valley home. Every housewife strove to make these specialties a little better, somewhat fancier than her neighbor could. Consequently the recipes that are presently exchanged could add value to any menu for the most fastidious gourmet.

The winters were cold and long in the "good old days" or "dans le bon vieux temps" as the present winter has been. When April came and the sugar season returned, the last crock of maple syrup had been a thing of the past for many months and the last lump of maple sugar, preserved for the Friday crêpes if visitors should come, was no bigger than a nutmeg nugget.

Every good housekeeper in those days was heir to the sins of pride as they are today. She would always put her best foot forward when acquaintances or distant relatives would drop in for (ordinarily) an unannounced visit. And that famous hideout of all good things would reveal to the outsider some rare treat that the family had gone without for weeks.

For the small fry of the family, visitors were always wonderful people for they meant quite a few tidbits that had not been tasted for a long, long time. The housewife wanted to show 'ces bons à riens' how they should live.

So the last chunk of maple sugar (literally sugar bread or loaf, "pain de sucre" as it was formed in the shape and size of a bread. Bread pans were used to put the hot sugar in at the camp to harden and the pan was emptied and reused at the next sugaring) would be slowly reconverted to the syrup and "beignets" were made for dessert.

The nearest modern dessert that can be compared to "beignets" would be corn fritters. Mrs. Donat Corbin of Grand Isle has gladly contributed the latest recipe to make these maple sugar delicacies.

RECIPE

3 eggs
2 teaspoons of baking powder
1 cup flour

Mix dough to consistency of doughnut dough, adding more if needed. Spoon into boiling maple syrup as one would doughnuts in shortening. Batter should at least make six "beignets."

As the whole process only takes about ten minutes, these were often made at the sugar camp at the end of the season when the hot sun of April would permit the whole family to spend a Sunday afternoon in the woods.

Maple sugar has been mentioned and "beignets" even cooked but the past has caught up with our story. We could be in the year 1000 or 1400 but the first time we hear about the whole process of sugaring is in the "Relations des Jésuites" under its most primitive forms. (Portugal, the Basque country, and France did not know and never have known the sugar maple). Father Biard, perhaps the first Jesuit to set foot in Acadia, mentions it and that was over three centuries ago.

One statement can be made to shorten this story. The process of making maple syrup and sugar did not change much from the time our ancestors came to the Waloostook River, (St. John River) trying to escape from the American Tories' greed after the revolt of the colonies from George III of England.

And then in one step we jump into my grandfather's sugar camp in the year 1890.

Sap is still dripping into white birch containers. Instead of a cedar wedge driven into immense century old maples, a cedar pipelet may have been substituted. Two black kettles instead of one may have speeded up the boiling process from the squaw's beginnings.

The first European civilization foresight may be responsible for this addition for grand-père was thinking of the demands of fifteen sweet "teeth" to fill in the course of a year. (They all seemed to like maple sugar on curdled milk, the old type of cottage cheese!)

A lean-to had been built. The previous summer had seen a week's activity with the aged ox, pulling to this central point, fallen, dried, old giants of the forest which

were crosscut and piled. This dry wood would save many hours of boiling the following spring, (for a weekly visit to the house could be anticipated where he could caress the baby on his knee and one must not forget the early part of the night when the whole family was asleep) and grand-père would carry on his back one hundred pounds of (sugarloafs) maple sugar a distance of five miles every Saturday to make sure his family would not be lacking this necessity.

In 1900 when the bark of the white birch became scarce along the river, bundles of this bark would be imported from some more productive district or where it had always been more common. Groups of men would gather some evenings in the spring and they would make their "casseeaux d'écorce" as a "frolic".

The large strips of bark were laid on the stove. As soon as they softened up, they were passed to the one next in line, ends were folded, and then a wooden peg would hold the folded ends in, making a two-gallon container that would hold the production of one tree for one whole day.

Picture in your mind the pile that 300 "casseeaux" would make and these were still many miles from the sugar camp.

When spring came the flank of "la première montagne" was taken up by the first settlers of that particular back settlement; "la deuxième montagne" by the next of kin; but "grand-père," being a late comer, had naturally gone to the third "tier" of hills from where he had begun his first clearing. What giant trees would open up their hearts to his young ardent manhood!

And so he must have been 50, 60, or 70 years old, and his 100 pound load of maple sugar became a legend in the district, for he had carried it on his back on snowshoes "à la fonte des neiges," ever since the memory of man.

And then grand-mère, with a little autumn snow in her hair, quel crocignols she could make!

There, from 1000 to 1900, this is the history of maple sugar, and somewhere in between wheat flour was brought in, someone learned to experiment with eggs or dropped one in a panful of wheat flour and we had crêpes au sucre d'érable; someone forgot to sweeten the dough and we got crocignols.

Perhaps the baby might have fallen off his crib and hit his head on the nearby pot, and the cooing mother forgot she had not sweetened her dough for her "pettes de

nommes" and so grand-père's syrup and sugar solved the predicament of the absentminded young mother and she invented crocignols, to utilize grand-père's great love for the bambin and greater love for the young wife.

Following is a recipe for crocignols by Mrs. Julie Albert. She should be the official cook for any Acadian celebration.

Croquesignols or crocignols (spelling the word is of no consequence. The eating... Ah!)

To: 2 cups warm water
2½ cup sugar
1 tsp. salt

Add: 1 cake yeast (or 1 pkg. dry yeast) crumbled, and enough flour to make a ball. Cover and let rise in warm place overnight.

Then: add ¼ cup melted butter
½ tsp. vanilla (optional)
Flour enough to knead

Roll in flat disks, the size of a saucer, cut two slashes in disk, twist, bringing edge into slash and pulling out. Fry in hot fat like doughnuts. Drain on brown paper or rack.

These should be eaten hot. If allowed to cool, reheat before serving. Dip them in maple syrup. Nothing compares to them in any modern "cookery" book.



Beans are worthy of our historical past



Whenever two or three are gathered together for an evening meal, it is worthwhile to take the trouble to bake beans. Beans help balance the budget anytime. What is more important, they constitute a meal that sticks to your ribs, stops you from warming up insipid, soggy T.V. dinners during the evening while you are looking at your favorite programs.

Their introduction as a staple food along the valley is lost in antiquity. No chronicler deemed them worthy to 'fanfare' their advent. They just seem to have 'snuck' up on it.

All that is known about their being quite commonly used are stories of lumberjacks who, although they grew fat and husky on their protein, made fun of their capacity of producing thunderous echoes when 30 men slept under the same all-encompassing blanket.

Beans cooked with salt pork were the staple food of the camps over a century ago. In fact, it was beans in the morning, beans at noon carefully brought to the yarding area by the cookie, and beans at night when the men trudged back to camp in the dark in the short January days.

The well-to-do families in those days had left off eating this plebian food but they always formed the basis of several meals on the farm and in the day-laborer's diet; at least in those households where the head of the family was careful to see that his children had enough to eat and would, consequently, wax strong and avoid many diseases that were apt to afflict families who did not have recourse to this source of food.

Beans became part of the soul food of the valley together with 'tourtières,' 'cortons,' 'griades' and the hot vegetable soups that appeared at every meal.

Just a few short years ago, (half a century or so), beans were grown on every farm. After maturity these were pulled by hand, stacked between two four-foot, sharpened stakes, driven in the soil about five inches. When these were filled up, roots all on one side, the top of the stakes were tied so that the stack would not spread out and topple. The wind and the sun would finish the drying process. Approximately two weeks were required to accomplish this.

Then an ox and, after the advent of the work horse, a horse would be harnessed to a 'p'tite' wagon; children would untie the twine used to tie these as it was saved. In former days osier, alder, or hazel twigs were used and these were thrown away as fresh twigs were used the following year.

The bean stalks with their dried pods would be carefully loaded onto these wagons so that the pods would not shatter, brought to the barn and restacked on long wooden poles that formed a secondary floor to these side sheds that one can still see attached to old barns. This loft was approximately 10 feet from the dirt floor and the air kept circulating through the plants.

The actual shelling of the beans would only start in late November when the evenings were becoming cold. The now really-seasoned beans were brought into the kitchen after the evening meal was over, all dishes washed, but for that evening, the floor would not be swept immediately after the meal. The stalks were placed in the center of the kitchen floor, chairs would be pulled around the piles and then everyone in the family joined in the shelling.

The shelled beans would be placed in the girls' aprons and the boys for once would do woman's work. If some young fellow happened to be a-courting one of the girls that night, he was expected to join in the fun. I never knew the amount shelled for I would have long been taken up to bed in my father's strong arms, but the amount must have been considerable for these shelling parties only occurred about twice a year.

There was never any evidence of the stalks and the empty pods the following morning. If one sneaked in that wonderful place where all food things were stored such as crocks of cucumber pickles, barrels of salt-cured meats,

smoked hams, dried herbs, one would find a whole barrel of beans that had not been there the day before.

Crockery pots always seemed to have been used to cook this wonderful dish. Although fragile they seem to be associated with beans.

When fireplaces were our only means of heating and cooking, they could be placed in the embers on the side of the main fire. On bread baking day they would be placed in the bread oven.

Black iron kettles, spiders, moulds for buckwheat muffins were expensive but crocks were used quite extensively in the kitchen half a century ago.

There is a time-respected recipe to cook beans in the family that has seemed to have suited all my brothers and sisters and the whole of Slintown. Pre-soak beans overnight. They triple in size. The amount depends on the size of the family as well as the size of each individual's stomach. Twenty-five cents of beans will feed three to four people.

Line the bottom of the bean pot with quarter inch slices of salt pork... 'du lard anglais.' The rind is usually shaved off in this fussy age. It can be kept though and fried crisp for your next cocktail party or eaten whenever you feel like nibbling while reading a Nero Wolfe detective if you have not yet gotten tired of the old gourmet or you can enjoy hand-feeding it to your dog if your doctor has enjoined you not to eat too much hog meat. (After this 'aside' I've lost track of the recipe).

Add two cups of these soaked beans, a little salt and pepper, cover with more slices of salt pork, two more cups of beans, continue filling your pot this way until you have the amount that you desire.

Top the whole with pork slices, add three to four tablespoonfuls of molasses (a little more if you like your beans sweet and who doesn't?). One half teaspoonful of dry mustard. This last is supposed to take care of any future gaseous digestive troubles for the finicky.

Add water just to cover, put in a 300 degree oven from four to five hours, checking every once in a while for water evaporation. Always add water just enough to barely cover.

If one is ambitious, a home-made bread will just complete this very filling, economical meal and make it fit for any old king who may drop in to visit you. Side dishes of home-made pickles, beets will make you eat more. Don't

disregard the lowly 'poye' if you have not the time for biscuits. If unexpected company should come and you fear that there may not be enough, the plebian hot dog, barbecued, fried, steamed, can add gusto to the meal and it will appear that you have been expecting these guests all the time.

Afterthoughts or "Notas Benes." You can always throw in that bean pot (whatever you do, always buy a large one), any old spruce partridge (usually inedible anyhow) that you put to soak in vinegar or wine (depending whether you belong to the WCTU or believe in the miracle of Cana) at the same time as the beans. Place it in the bottom of the pot on that English-speaking salt pork.

You can even try some hind quarters of our lowly hare when the foxes have not eaten them all in your snares. It would not be a bad place to put in that foul smelling bird that you may have shot by mistake, the elusive woodcock. These will not spoil the beans and may sometimes turn out to be quite edible. You can always tell your friends (who may not have tried these) how wonderful they have turned out.



Soupe à la poulette grasse



Soupe à La Poulette Grasse
Soupe à La Pigweed
Soupe à La Goosefoot
Soupe au Lamb's Quarter
Jus Chenopodium

A dissertation on a "soupe paysanne" made in the Valley in the long ago.

So that this column will not degenerate into a page appropriate to the Ladies' Home Journal or to the women's page of the Valley TIMES, I want to prefix it with the assertion that there is a strict historical background to the following recipe.

The people who are young enough to remember 70 or so years ago will have mental flashbacks and their gastric juices will begin to secrete at the very mention of the words "soupe à la poulette grasse." They learned to appreciate this wonderful soup from their mothers who had learned to make this succulent concoction from the same source that they had.

Historically we now antedate 1850. It is definitely a "soupe paysanne." It will always remain a seasonal soup for its perfection depends on the freshness and availability of its ingredients.

"Poulette Grasse" has been translated "Fat Chicken" by the agricultural experts of Aroostook Federation of Farmers. This is mainly due to our own ignorance of the art of the translator.

Poulette is a chicken all right but poulette is a young

female chicken when it is just betwixt and between adulthood when it becomes a hen or poule. The last on the streets of Paris connotes something totally different. Its meaning does not pertain to the scope of the present subject nor would its meaning enhance our knowledge of the history of the Valley.

But "Poulette Grasse" is neither chicken nor goose nor duck nor pig.

It is a weed that usually grows in very fertile soil. It has become an obnoxious weed in our potato fields as the fertility of these has been increased through heavy liming.

Continuous applications of animal manure also gave a chance to this weed seed to germinate next to our grandmothers' 'potager' or vegetable garden.

The modern way of destroying this weed is to apply a chemical that has several trade names according to the companies that manufacture it. In the old days it was pulled by hand when it threatened to invade the garden and its leaves were used all summer long.

If one goes back to the four names heading these lines, one can easily realize that there must be something about the plant that reminds people close to the land of some section of an animal.

In certain districts of the United States it is called pigweed. The reason for this may very well be that it has chosen the proximity of pigsties to grow at its best on account of the fertility of the soil.

Goosefoot for a name would be derived from the shape of its leaf.

The reason for the name of lamb's quarter is wholly unknown to the present writer unless it can be attributed to the finickiness or prudishness of the well brought up ladies around Boston who could not pucker their sophisticated mouths to pronounce pigweed or goosefoot. These are really barnyard words. Pork and fowl are much more ladylike names. Spring lamb by its very sound has a certain flavor on the tongue that hog meat and sow belly can never approach.

Be that as it may the leaf of the above plant does have some resemblance to the foot of a fowl. The Valley people in anticipation of a meal of young fat female hens (Henette can easily be manufactured) just went along and called the weed "poulette grasse."

At the end of May lamb's quarter has reached a height

of three to four inches where the soil has not been plowed. Its leaves are quite large. At this time the plant can be pulled up, roots cut off, and the whole plant can be incorporated into the soup. Later on in the season when it has reached a height of five to ten feet just the top, tender leaves are taken. There is a kind of downy dust covering the leaves at all times except in its very early growth.

Winters were particularly severe in the early days of the colony. No green stuff had been eaten since the last of January. Even at that time of the year the cabbages hung on the walls of the root cellar began to look much like dry plucked chickens with their heads and legs left on. Yellow turnips (rutabaga on seed packages) would last perhaps until the end of March. Salt was so high in price that it could not be used as a preservative for dandelion greens, string beans, and cucumbers as it was to become current usage in the latter part of the nineteenth century until a generation ago or so. In the early days salt was only used to salt meats and in some households it was used so sparingly that the first surveyors who reached the Valley from the southern part of the state mentioned in their reports that they ate rancid pork in some homes. It took hard cash to buy salt and transportation charges by birch canoes and portages far exceeded the price of this much needed necessity which was obtained at Rivière-du-Loup.

And so (I know that I'm not supposed to start a sentence with an 'and' but it's an old French Valley custom when one gets ready to tell a whopper) when spring brought its first edible plants these were appreciated in a way that our jaded palates, surfeited without winter markets' vegetable displays (however tasteless these may turn out to be after one has them home) can not bring back to our imaginations the pleasures that our ancestors experienced in tasting these first green plants.

1972 Recipe for Soupe à la Poulette Grasse

The friendly butcher has long disappeared from the scene. The expression, "my butcher," can no longer be used for if one did the whole U.S.D.A. would bring you to our county court and question you as to the name of the person who had slaughtered the animal. To be a butcher now it takes an investment of at least a quarter of a million dollars to get ready or get the right kind of a knife to slaughter an animal for sale. Not only must the wages of a

meat inspector imported from a special federally controlled and inspected school... located at some "septic" Washington headquarter... be guaranteed from the time the butcher is born until he has satisfied his urge of slaughtering your favorite beef but the building in which the heinous crime will be committed must have a hundred foot hot-top apron surrounding it. By that time your friendly butcher has lost all feelings of coddling any customer and is yearning to set his tenterhooks in your very entrails. He wants to recuperate his immense investment and make a good showing in his first payment to the state's S.B.A. (Small (?) Business Administration (?) loan and pay 1-100 of 1% to any Aroostook County bank that has had the temerity of backing 10% of the original loan. After that there can be no such person as a friendly butcher. One can call him the butcher but not my butcher for the closer one gets to him the faster can one get skinned. But all that is needed for your special soup is a bone.

No one can visit the supermarkets and pay ten or twenty-five cents for a soup bone. These are cellophane-wrapped, meatless, suetless, anaemic bony stumps. Advice: Let them stay in their federally controlled antiseptic wrapper until the law of decomposition sets in and are carted to the town dump where they may furnish adequate receptacles for maggot fly eggs.

To get a good soup bone make the small investment of buying a Saint Bernard pup. It may cost you a trifle over two hundred dollars or so but what is that investment if you consider the fact that you will be guaranteed good soup bones for the next twelve or fifteen years? Wash and curry the pup until it is snow white, at least the parts that are white by nature. Carry the pup in your arms to your meat market. (Notice: no mention of butcher. It's anathema). The pup is only a bundle of fluff, it drools, it bawls, it tears may come down its eyes. Give it a kiss or so. I guarantee dogs are quite safe especially after they have had their nth shot for rabies, tetanus, cholera, small pox, syphilis. Much safer than your favorite girlfriend. Is there a man who will not respond to such a sight... a manicured, snow-white, tan, black Saint Bernard pup? You can tell the man that the poor pup has developed tooth trouble although its mouth smells wonderfully sweet to you but like all children it has growing teeth pain. It likes to chew. The poor little beastie would so like to try its pristine in-

cisor teeth on a real bone! Keep that first bone for your first real soup. Depend upon it. It is choice. The marrow on crackers is a gourmet's delight. It would be nectar even for the most fastidious Eskimo who knows how to enjoy the exquisite delicacy of a bone's marrow. From now on it is up to your personality, your psychological knowhow to sell permanently the cute bitchiness of your pup (in my case it's a she) to the man with a heavy finger, to the man who can become bitch enamoured. You will get the nicest of the bones that are generally thrown in unseen boxes near the chopping block. Most clients never see these bones and these are carted to the rat heap at the dump but that's just where your best meaty, fatty bones are to be found. Remember now that the best of these bones will be kept as a courtesy for your pup which, by the way, in no time will strain your carrying capacity. And so now we have our bone for the "soupe-paysanne."

Take a four quart sauce pan, fill half full with water. Add salt, pepper, and the bone as a matter of course, the same that was given for your pup (duly rinsed... not the pup, the bone), a few fresh celery leaves, a few drops of Worcestershire sauce, a medium sized onion and leave simmer... any number of hours. At least one and a half if you're in a hurry.

Stroll to the garden and pick a quart of fresh potatoes and two handfuls of poulette grasse leaves. Wash leaves thoroughly. Chop roughly... no smaller than half inch pieces. Scrape skin off fresh potatoes or peel old ones. Dice. Leave in bowl covered with water if bone has not simmered the required time. When you notice that the marrow has shrunk from the inside of the bone, take bone out, place in platter, extract the marrow. Leave cool for a minute or so, then eat on extra crisp crackers. After cooling now you can throw the bone to your pup. After all one has to go to confession once in a while if only to the modern head shrinker. The pup really did get the bone.

After removing the over-cooked onion, the celery leaves, from this bouillon, add your chopped leaves of poulette grasse, diced potatoes, a good pinch of rinsed salted (pickled) leek stalks, a wee bit of summer savory from last year's stock. In about half an hour's time the whole should fill the kitchen with a unique aroma and your soup is ready. Right before serving you can top with croutons that can be made with that bread that did not rise as well as usual for last Saturday's baked beans. These can

be made in the oven at the same time as your bone is simmering. Just drop a handful in each plate. You will thus feel that you are being a very economical cook and will salve your extravagance for buying that half a pound of hamburger for the pup. You now have a soupe paysanne a la poulette grasse that is fit for the gods in their Elysium.

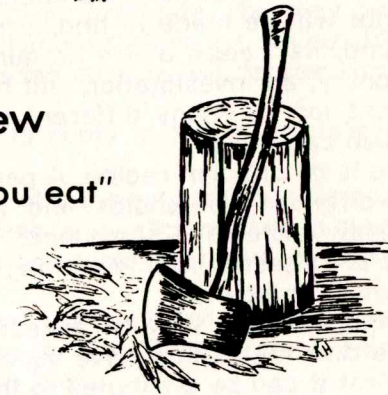
As it is the custom in this household to terminate any meal with a mouthful of sweets, a shortcake topped with wild strawberries is not amiss to give that midday lift so needed to plan the evening meal.

P.S. As this is 1972 and I know that many of you can not get that ideal soup bone, a few beef cubes will do with a chicken one thrown in. Variations to the above should be tried with your favorite herbs.



Chicken Stew

"You are what you eat"



If Freud could say: Tell me all your dreams, and I'll tell you about your past and foretell your future, you can also tell me what you've eaten or what you would like to eat and, whether you are in the wilds of New York City or enjoying the fleshpots of California or the lush paradise of Florida, if you answer me that you would care for a nice mess of fiddleheads cooked with salt pork, a thick stack of buckwheat 'ploys' with 'griades', or chicken stew, I'll say: My lad... my lass, you come from the valley of 'the River Saint-John.'

Your name may be Baker, White, Brown, Bishop or it might even be Gaberewski or even Muskie, but if you tell me that you would like to taste one of the above, I'll say that one of your ancestors must have been Bélanger, Leblanc, Lebrun, Levesque or if it is one of the last two, your grandmother must have come from this same place.

Replicas of the above meals were being duplicated several generations ago in the Far West in such states as Montana, the Dakotas and Oregon and lately in every state of the Union.

The above is just a preamble of what the following lines will be about. If you don't like to eat or cook chicken stew, you can wait for some other things that might interest you in the foreseeable future but this recipe is too simple to be short.

Chicken stew "à la vallée" is no laughing matter. It is not complicated yet because of its very simplicity, of its diversity in taste due to the finesse of the different cooks that grace our several hundred kitchens along the River, an attempt will be made to find, first of all, its historic background, its 'raison d'être' in our culinary heritage; and, secondly, an investigation will be conducted to find the reasons for the many different tastes that this particular dish can have.

There is no uniform recipe. A person may eat it in a hundred different households and never say that the chicken stew tasted the same once either at John's or Methaide's. It seems that the imaginations of our ancestors knew no bounds.

The question can now be asked: Why are there so many one-dish meals that have survived throughout the years? First it can be attributed to the art of our female ancestors who knew how to please menfolk who had spent hours clearing land or many months in lumbercamps. Of course, these one-dish meals were natural to people who only had an open hearth to cook on. In many cabins there might have been just one pot to cook in and so to vary the fare, the cook had to improvise on many themes.

She also had to have a meal that would stick to the ribs... no clear bouillon or the ilk. It had to be substantial. This runs throughout all the main dishes which have come down to us and which are still regarded fit for family reunions, fit for the outlander who has condescended to study our primitive ways of life.

These meals still are (in the vernacular) really something when one wants to put his best foot forward.

Chicken stew has been chosen as the main one of these dishes on account of its very simplicity and universality. Many people who have never made chicken stew can try it without making too much of a mess. No matter how inept they may be as cooks, the final result of their effort would be edible by their man or at least be fit for their dog.

"Pot-en-pot" was considered for a recipe but its many delicate shadings in the making were considered too difficult for the tyro in 'valley' cooking.

Remember that our ancestors were masters in this art and that the modern bride if she still is so old-fashioned as to want the Gordian knot of marriage may never have faced the realities of cooking a meal or may be so ignorant that the only food that she knows how to prepare is to buy a TV dinner at the neighborhood store and place it in the oven.

If she is a highschool graduate, she may be able to read part of the instructions given on the outside of the package and turn on the oven to 450 degrees for half an hour.

If her man should come in two hours late, pity the burnt mess.

Let us presume that she may want to reform and cook. All these considerations have influenced us in choosing the simplest of the simple meals that are so loved by the people of the valley.

Many generations before 1900 many towns had grown along the banks of the St. John River. In fact most of them were incorporated in 1869.

A few lawyers and doctors had opened offices in the larger communities. Lumber barons and storekeepers also formed part of the upper-class.

Parish priests ruled their flocks with the fear of hell and an all-prevailing love. One must not forget the post-masters and the representatives of the state legislature.

These constituted a social class that would not condescend to keep their own fowls although they may have had their own gardens to grow vegetables like garlic, herbs, and exotic plants such as asparagus. Servants would care for these gardens. Slaughtering barnyard creatures would have been considered too menial a task for them.

In the case of storekeepers the system of bartering so prevalent then made them realize that their time would be better spent looking after their accounts than feeding poultry. They were forced to receive such an amount of these which they could not possibly consume in their own household that they were forced to use them in bartering with their own suppliers.

They needed lumber for building, horses, waggons, bobsleds. All these items were prime objects for bartering. Hens and roosters and eggs became important in the agricultural life of the community.

The producer of these never tasted them when there was a scarcity. Eggs were only eaten on the farm when eggs were in abundance and these only became abundant when feed for the flock was abundant during the summer months.

Custard pies were made. Slices of white bacon would be cooked crisp and a dozen of eggs would be cooked in the sizzling fat.

When hens were hatching their young ones, the old roosters would have their red crested heads cut off. It was also the time when, of a Sunday, relatives would visit either from the neighboring village or, depending on the age of the children, the daughters would bring their husbands and their own children to the ancestral home to show off the qualities of their brood.

What would be simpler and more nourishing than serving a chicken stew to the ten or fifteen people who would sit around the family table?

All this happened generations before the time that F.D. Roosevelt promised us a chicken in every pot. In those days chickens as we now understand the term were never eaten really. Our modern conception of chicken was not even known.

No person in his right mind would ever have considered killing a bird that was only ten weeks old or only weighed two or three pounds. It would have been thought to be a sacrilege to kill an animal that had not reached its maximum growth. No imagination could have conceived such an extravagance.

This concept was universal in slaughtering all farm animals. Veal, as USDA now defines veal, was unknown. A lamb might be slaughtered but it would be a cosset lamb, a bottle-fed lamb that would never become a wool-producer

or had become too butting happy in its early feelings of ramhood.

A six week old shoat might be slaughtered for family gatherings but it would have to be ruptured or have some minor defect that would impede its eventual growth into becoming a three to four hundred pounder.

Shoats (which would always be stuffed and baked) might be considered an exception to the above rule. They had become a symbol of largesse and the height of Epicureanism in large family gatherings or marriage banquets. Even perfect small pigs would be slaughtered. It is still occasionally being done.

Geese and turkeys had to weigh at least ten pounds, ducks five, chickens the same to be fit for the chopping block.

As all fowls were born in the month of June and even in July, the time for slaughtering would never begin before the end of October.

This season would extend to the icy days of cold weather when the balance of all fowls would be killed, iced, and safely buried into grain bins where it would be partially protected from sudden thaws.

Winter sales to the nearby village would be taken from this cache. Weekly visits to the granary when company came would also deplete this stock.

Chicken stews would vary the diet of "le temps des fêtes" when the bulk of the feasting would include the ever delicious, ever ready "tourtières" and the tantalizing "croque-cignols."

"Le temps des fêtes" included the shortest days of the year. Weatherwise the days were the coldest of the season and blizzards were not uncommon. And when "la neige venait des petits Andrés," a real storm was in the making.

It should have been the most depressing time of the year yet it turned out to be the gayest. It was looked forward to. It became a source of memories for the ensuing months.

Young and older men came back from lumbercamps "pour le temps des fêtes." They sang the sad love songs that had gripped their hearts in the depth of the wilderness. They told the tales with which old raconteurs had shortened the long evenings of camp life. For the unmarried it was the time to renew one's loves, for the married a consummation of love.

It was a time to forget the loneliness of the upper reaches of the Allagash and the St. John River. It was a time of gaiety and merrymaking, of fellowship and friendship. "C'était le temps des fêtes."

What has Julia Childs ever invented that can compare to the memories that the words 'chicken stew' can evoke? Can any cordon bleu from the two hundred dollar meal of a Parisian elite restaurant stand a chance to come up to what we experienced when this dish was presented to our famished young stomachs yearning for the taste of the white meat of an old rooster or an old hen? Would we have preferred this to some gooey mess of cheese, wine, and half-cooked pressed duck? Tripe à la mode de Caën? No sir!

The nectar taste of the first spoonful of the delicious stew on your tongue, the gulping of a 'poutine' down your throat, and the appreciation of that bit of white meat against your palate, the realization of the fact that economy had been thrown to the wind in your household, all this made it a wonderful time to live in.

What a wonderful person could your mother be! It was grand to be alive just to taste this dish. Paradise could not promise any greater joy. Winds raging outside, fifteen at table, chicken stew in a large bowl and more in a larger kettle on the rear of the woodburning stove, the talking and the kidding, the stories that would follow during the rest of the evening, all this was part of living in the back settlements a hundred years ago.

It is still part of life in the valley. It has been for two hundred years.

Chicken stew is not a meal that the homemakers of the Extension Service will ever mention or recommend. Neither will it make the front page of any cookbook. It is not fancy enough either in the serving or in the eating.

It is also too inexpensive. With three dollars' worth of meat plus sixty cents worth of potatoes and flour ten persons can be fed to repletion. That equates to 36 cents per person. The rest is just water, a few herbs taken from the garden or patches of wild uncultivated land such as aniseed which grows by the roadside.

A year's supply of the last mentioned herb can be gathered in the latter part of August. Hang it in your garage for further conditioning and drying. Then it can be hand-threshed and stored in jars for the coming year.

Recipes for chicken stew vary of course but much depends on the birds which you will choose. The freshness of the birds that you will find at your regular butcher shop can not be disputed. These birds can be used and will make a good stew but if you want the best, those that were used in the long ago, it is advisable to go to a local egg producer. There are a few left near each large community of the valley.

Don't be brusque and demanding. Be most polite as he is a very busy man. If he's feeding or grading, don't disturb him. Inquire from his wife, if she isn't helping, as to what time it would be most convenient to see Mr. So and So. You could even leave a box of chocolates for the wife or a six-pack for the husband if it's a warm summer day.

This should prepare the way of getting the choicest birds when the time to slaughter arrives. The manager of a modern egg factory has to be merciless in his attitude towards his flock. He tells his hens every morning: If you don't lay, I chop. There comes a day that this forced production takes its toll over nature. The birds become neurotic and the flock stops laying. If you've done your fieldwork well, the manager will notify you that you can come and get your birds.

The time has arrived when thousands of birds will be shipped to an outside market. Their value if they weigh five pounds will not be more than ten cents a pound and that is a premium price. You can expect to pay seventy-five cents per bird, at the most a dollar. At the last price you will be doing the seller an act of charity but he needs the money.

If he chooses the nicest birds, you will be doing yourself a favor. Don't be miserly, it will repay you to pay him top prices.

Of course these old layers - old in the sense that they may have reached the ripe old age of a year and a half - will be very much alive and be covered with feathers. Consequently you will have to wring their necks, dip them in scalding water, and pluck them.

If they are still very fat and they should be at that price, there will not be any pin-feathers. Wash them well and one can even use a little soap. Remember that birds rarely frequent bathtubs. Even wild birds may play-act at bathing in puddles but that's the extent of bathing that birds will practice. (Quand on dit qu'elle sent la p'tite perdrix, watch out!)

Your next step is to eviscerate these birds. This just means to cut near their rear-end and take out the entrails. Take these to the dump as soon as you are through with the whole amount that you bought. The rats will be there to welcome you. Of course the neighborhood cats would eat most of these but they are apt to leave a residue that will scent your backyard until the next downpour.

Gizzards should be cut open and cleaned. Hearts should also be saved. These make wonderful soups or exotic stuffing for turkey, young porkers, geese or what have you. Livers can be made into a paste that will resemble 'paté de foie gras.' To our uneducated palate it is far superior to the French 'paté' which is really too fat for cardiacs and, if you want to know the real truth, it is too expensive for our valley pocketbooks.

All these secondary tidbits are really choice meats for your stew to the initiated. In ancient times they were kept for the guests and rarely were the children of the household permitted to eat them.

The killing and the cleaning of ten or fifteen hens should keep the modern housewife occupied part of an afternoon. It might curtail your golf game for that day but it will give you just as much exercise.

Instead of spending money you will have saved a considerable sum for these hens will cost you from fifteen to twenty cents a pound. Added to these savings you will also possess the ideal birds to make several stews.

A bird will take anywhere from two and a half to three and a half hours to cook. Don't ever buy a bird that has begun to thin out. Always buy the fattest that you can find. If there is too much fat, de-fat or de-grease it and keep this fat to add to gravies, soups or casseroles.

These old birds will not cook too fast and will be just right when it is time to add the other ingredients to your stew: 7:30 to 10:30 if you are planning the stew for a noon meal.

Get out your biggest kettle or pot, place the bird in it and cover with water. Add salt, pepper, onion, summer savory, a pinch of aniseed. Then relax for a couple of hours while this simmers and your kitchen fills with the aroma that will tantalize the most jaded gourmet.

When the 'critter' is tender, take out and place on platter. Chunk or dice two or three potatoes. Let your general savoir faire dictate the amount. You need just enough to start adding body to this delicious bouillon.

Now we've come to the most important part of the stew; the making of 'poutines.' The word 'poutine' is not in any French dictionary but it forms part of our valley French. It has even been made into a verb 'poutiner' which means to fondle, to stroke lovingly, to caress.

A great love has to be given to these small squares of rolled out dough which finishes up the needed body that your stew requires for its success. These are not dumplings by any stretch of the imagination, yet this is the only word that can be used or found in the English language that will correlate to the word 'poutines'.

RECIPE for 'POUTINES' — Three cups of flour, a pinch of salt, add enough water to form into a ball. Knead this several times. With rolling pin flatten as thin as you possibly can. Cut in strips with pizza cutter or sharp knife. With scissors cut in inch length and drop into your simmering bouillon. It will take about ten minutes for these to cook.

While these are cooking, strip all meat from the carcass of your bird which has now cooled. Skin, gristle, and bones are fed to the dog. The meat is returned to the pot.

Et voilà! Ring the dinner bell and your guests will run from neighboring camps if you are at the lake or from the stable where they might have been admiring a newborn litter of pigs or a new tractor.

This should be the end of this stew episode but the modern housewife has tried to sublimate this humble concoction. Sometimes a small amount of celery is added or thinly sliced carrots. An egg is added to the dough of the 'poutines.' For the tyro, the beginner, the menfolk who like to cook, it is advisable to stick to bird, potatoes, flour, water and seasonings.

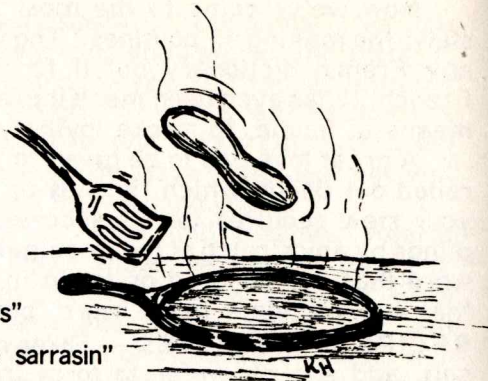
Chicken stew was not always like this. A couple of generations ago, the bird would only be disjointed before serving and a plate would hold a chicken leg or part of the carcass. Guests were consulted as to which piece that they preferred. Many would express a desire for that unique delicacy the rear part of the bird to which the tail-feathers adhere (le p'tit os d'la queue).

The skin of the bird was also relished. Bones were (delicately) taken in the fingers and the juices were as noiselessly sucked out as it was humanly possible. Dogs fared indifferently in those days for the bones were cleaned out.

Buckwheat Pancakes

"Bockouite - des ployes"

"Sarrasin - galettes de sarrasin"



This will not be a learned dissertation of buckwheat and its products. You may well wonder why these lines are written under the umbrella of the Madawaska Historical Society. If bread has often been considered the staff of life in a vast part of our western civilization, buckwheat pancakes can be equally called that for the Valley for a period of at least 70 years.

Wheat growing for this part of the world is at best a risky crop. Wheat requires a rich soil and a long season to grow and ripen. The survival of the settlement on the river was threatened with starvation in its infancy several times by the failure of the wheat crop due to late plantings, early frosts and September snowfalls.

It was only after the advent of buckwheat in this territory that the settlers were assured of a constant supply of flour. It gradually supplanted most wheat plantings although the latter's flour was preferred in all bakings of pastries and biscuits but these at the time were not considered the essentials of life.

Buckwheat is grown all over the western world. It is a grain crop that is fast disappearing. In 1870 22 million bushels were grown in the United States. A hundred years later it has come down to about 3 million bushels. The same ratio may be applied to the Valley. (Farmers' Bulletin 2095, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture).

Our ancestors along the Valley apparently had not brought the seed with them for the good French word (?) 'bockouite' would not have been invented. If they had they would have said and we would be saying 'sarrasin' or 'blé noir' as it is called in all the districts of France where this

grain is still being grown. The Canadians imported it from France and always refer to it as 'sarrasin'.

It must have reached the Valley after the county was settled by Yankees from the lower part of the state. They too suffered from the early frosts and could not depend upon their wheat crop. So they brought up from southern Maine the only grain that could produce flour for their needs.

This statement may surprise many local residents for until a few years back we thought that 'ployes' were a local delicacy, something really unique to our little world. Until 25 years ago buckwheat pancakes were just as commonly used in most old Yankee farm homesteads in the county as they were in the Valley. To prove this a cookbook published by the Congregationalist ladies of Houlton and their friends in 1887 had no less than two recipes on how to make these same pancakes and one on how to make buckwheat cake. These recipes will be given later. They are very similar to those that our grandmothers followed to fill our grandfathers' lumbercamp enlarged stomachs.

The local French word for pancakes, of course, is not to be found in any dictionary. The origin of the word is still in the realm of speculation.

On the Canadian side of the river it is spelled 'plogues'. The pronunciation has not been verified. On this side of the river it has never been officially written but it is pronounced 'ployes' or if one prefers 'ploies' (with a tremas on the i... two little dots which signify that i is pronounced separately).

Dr. Geneviève Massignon of Sorbonne fame, misled perhaps by the Canadian spelling, seems to associate the word to the English phrase, a plug of tobacco, but there is no resemblance between a plug of tobacco and a 'ployes' especially not in taste although both may be delicious in a man's opinion, depending whether he is hungry or whether he wants to relax with a good chew of tobacco.

But how are ployes eaten? Flat on their back or flat on their abdomen? "Elles sont toujours pliées ou roulées." The word 'plier' may be the key to our 'ployes'. Of course, the old world could never invent such a word. There was such a scarcity of the good things of this world in the Saintonge, Loire or St. Malo districts. At that time the peasant of France might eat meat four times a year. There were no rich gravies to scoop; no maple syrup to clean from a wooden plate; no sauce blanche rich with fried salt

pork fat to dip their 'ploys' in. Let us not forget the bouillons from combined beef and pork roasts, geese and ducks, and even from the old rooster that had lorded the chicken yard for a year, if not tender he at least could add savor to a dish which our present anemic 'volailles' that are sold in our supermarkets can never hope to produce, but again an old man's mind has wandered from the origin of a word, plier, ploies...

They are always folded, rolled, bent and never eaten like the unlive bread of the Lebanese. We fold them to scoop, to absorb all the good things that may remain on a plate, to taste the fineness of the herbs dropped in the 'patates fricassées'. Is there no resemblance from the phrase 'plier so pain' to 'ploys'?

There are as many varieties of buckwheat as there are varieties of wheat. Two kinds are now being grown in the Valley... one solely as a green manure crop. It is called Japanese buckwheat and the local name given to it 25 years ago was 'sarrasin'. Its flour was not considered fit for our local 'ploys'.

It is shaped like a beechnut and its outer hull is smooth like that nut except that it is much smaller. Our local buckwheat which is used for pancake flour replaced an older variety about 30 years ago. Its outer hull is rough and might be compared to the skin of a toad. It may belong to the Tartary or Silverhull variety... and we just call it 'bockouite'.

It might be interesting to note here that dried or green buckwheat plants are a good source of rutin... used to strengthen weak capillary blood vessels and to prevent or reduce certain types of hemorrhage. Rutin is also effective in the treatment of frostbite and burns produced by X-rays, and it may benefit persons exposed to dangerous atomic radiation.

What does the rest of the world call our local 'ploys'? In France they are called different names depending on the local dialects. Bas-Maine galet: "Pâte que l'on étend sur une gallwer frotté de beurre fondu et que l'on fait cuire comme des crêpes". Haut-Maine: 'galette' pâte (farine de blé noir) que l'on fait saisir par le feu, de même que les crêpes, sur un poêle. "Normandie, Percy, Alençon, Plechatel, Ill-et-Vilaine, Nantes all use the word "galette...sorte de crêpe de blé noir". Canada uses outside the Madawaska Territory the word 'galette de sarrasin'. You may call them by any other name and they will taste

just as good. Happy the man who has a wife who can make good 'ploys' when he returns home from work particularly if the roast has plenty of gravy! But the art of making 'ploys' is generally disappearing... even in our midst.

There are but three mills which are equipped to grind buckwheat into flour between the St. Lawrence River and the coast of Maine. Two are in the Province of New Brunswick and there is only one in Maine and that one is located in Upper Frenchville and is owned by Mr. Gédéon Corriveau. Once these mills could be found in every community along the river. In some towns there might even be two both grinding wheat and buckwheat. The miller would rarely be paid in hard cash but would take a tenth of the grain brought to be ground. This was called "la mouture".

The miller would sell his flour to the townspeople or after the advent of the railroad he would have an occasional demand from outside from people originating from the district who were suffering from nostalgia for a taste of 'ploys'. The "son", or middlings or bran or "gru..." the coarser or darker flour... was sold for feed to be mixed with cull potatoes to fatten hogs or geese for fall slaughter.

The old wooden bucket that grandmother kept in the kitchen area, somewhere either on the back of the woodburning stove or in another warm spot, has all but disappeared except in someone's imagination and memory. It was always covered with a hand-loomed linen towel to keep the batter at the right temperature and also, one must not forget, to keep out the occasional housefly that was bound to intrude in the kitchen. In that bucket was always kept a certain amount of leaven to start the following day's pancakes. The size of the bucket was regulated by the size of the family.

Recipes for 'ploys', good or bad, but all delicious.

'Ploys à l'eau'

'Ploys au lait'

'Ploys au levain'

It seems it would be appropriate to start with the oldest recipes that I have been able to find and these are from the Home Cook Book, published by the Congregationalist Ladies of Houlton in 1887 to 1903. It is also a friendly gesture to the rest of the county showing that the people of the Valley do not forget their existence.

1. Buckwheat Cakes

2 cups of buttermilk, ½ teaspoon soda, 2 mixing spoons of prepared flour, 1 teaspoon soda, and 1 cup of buckwheat. Cook on a hot griddle.

2. Griddle Cakes

One pint lukewarm water, half a cup of yeast, a little salt. Add equal quantities of graham and buckwheat meal to make a batter. Set in a warm place to rise overnight. If in the morning they seem sour, add a little soda dissolved in hot water and stir well.

3. Buckwheat Cake

Two cups good sour milk, one cup buckwheat, one and a half cups of flour, small teaspoon of baking powder, small teaspoon of soda and a little salt. Bake in a quick oven.

The above three recipes show that the ladies from Houlton knew their pancakes and that they did not consider them so plebian as not to be included in a formal cookbook.

The following is a sugar-camp recipe where ingredients are scarce. Snow can be melted for water or if the weather is warm, just scoop it from any freshet. There is always soda in a sugar camp for it is a place where one is apt to eat too much.

Now without too much ado, here's the recipe: 1½ cups of buckwheat flour, measuring isn't that important, some wheat flour, "de la farine blanche", salt a wee bit, add water and stir to a thick consistency; add ¼ teaspoonful of baking soda or a couple of good 'pinches'; take boiling water from kettle and pour over soda, mix well; add more water until mess is quite liquified! Heat 'poêle à ployes'; just about right, grease with small chunk of salt pork or use rag dipped in pan-drippings; spoon batter of above-mentioned mess on skillet, leave a minute or thereabouts, turn with 'palette à ployes', leave just a soupçon, and then eat just as fast as you can.

These are called 'ployes' à l'eau, water pancakes, this is meaningless, insipid, and it sounds tasteless, but in reality with ham and eggs, griades, (fried salt pork, sliced thin, and cooked to a crisp), the white bacon of the south,

the soul food of the Acadian coureur des bois, or with maple syrup, it all becomes a mouthful fit for the gods of Mount Olympus! Wasn't Acadia first named Arcadia, a country in ancient Greece?

Of course in the good old days we just used butter, smeared the things with good 'castenade' or wrapped a slice of cold cooked salt pork, those were the days, but (with my wife around and doctor Helfrich in the background) all these good things are 'verboten'.

The following will be the best of recipes of buckwheat pancakes. They are modern, refined, and have to be followed to the letter.

Frenchville Buckwheat Pancakes

One cup buckwheat flour; 1 cup white flour (all purpose flour); 2 teaspoons of Davis Baking Powder (double-acting) (heaping); 1 heaping teaspoon of salt; dilute all in cold water until thick; add 1 cup boiling water, stirring; add more water if still too thick; add 1 full tablespoonful of cider vinegar; connect electric frying pan to 420 degrees; spoon batter to six inch diameter for pancake. Cook. Guaranteed to be delicious.

St. David Recipe

Sift 2 cups of buckwheat flour with one half cup of white flour. Soak one yeast cake in warm water. Heat 2 cups of water and add to dry ingredients. Place in a covered crock and let rise overnight. In the morning add ½ tsp. of soda, (go back to Houlton) and add salt and ¼ cup sugar. Moisten with hot milk. Cook on a greased, preheated skillet or griddle, just go to Mrs. Rice in Madawaska and ask for a 'poêle à ployes' and she will know what you mean or even with the word 'ployeuse'. Store a small amount of this dough in the refrigerator to use with new dough.

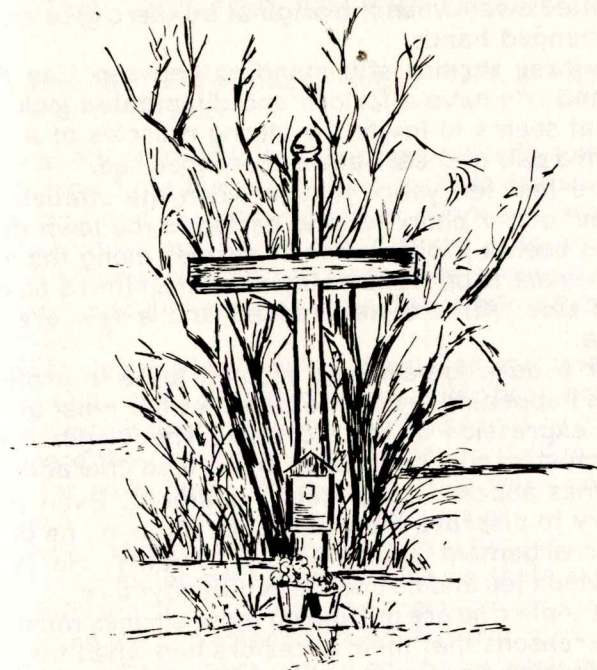
But we mustn't forget Canada, Crêpes à la farine de sarrasin. This recipe is all in French and it is impossible to find a translator but here goes for all our Canadian culture is worth!

Deux tasses de lait tiède; ½ carré de levure (¼ d'once); ½ tasse d'eau tiède; ½ c. t. de sel; 2½ tasses de

farine de sarrasin; 1 c. tb. de mélasse; ¼ c. t. de soda dissous dans 2 c. tb. d'eau tiède.

Those must be all the ingredients that one needs, now follow all the instructions.

Mettre la farine dans un grand bol; et ajouter le lait tiède peu à peu, la levure dissoute dans l'eau tiède et le sel. Laisser lever toute la nuit dans une place chaude (75 à 80 degré F.) Le matin, brasser le mélange et ajouter la mélasse et le soda dissous. Mélanger parfaitement et faire cuire par cuillérées dans une poêle à frire, graissée et bien chaude; faire cuire sur un côté et quand elles sont cuites sur le tour, tourner de l'autre côté. Servir avec du beurre ou du sirop.



Roadside Shrines

"Such as the traveller sees in regions remote by the roadside,
Built o'er a box for the poor, or the blessed image of Mary."

Longfellow... "Evangeline."

The Valley must be the last place in the U.S. where roadside shrines still exist. They have existed from time immemorial.

The reasons for the erection of some of them have long been forgotten. Perhaps the reason was never known to people outside the immediate family. There is no doubt that some were built in memory of a beloved spouse or child; others for a favor obtained through the intercession of the Virgin. A few, more pretentious than the common ones, were put to commemorate the site of a cemetery or a church.

Several have totally disappeared through rerouting the original roads connecting the several towns after the river had been abandoned as the main artery of travel.

Many rotted away when the original builders died and the farms changed hands.

The three shrines still standing between Van Buren and Grand Isle have a forlorn and dilapidated look about them that seems to invite the strong muscles of a young man with a pair of shears and a sharpened hoe.

In the last ten years though when the statues were thrown out of our churches and carted to the town dumps there has been a proliferation of shrines along the whole river. They are to be found on lawns in most towns as along the road side. All are well tended and a few are very elaborate.

Their sudden appearance seemed to be in protest of what was happening inside the churches but most of them were an expression of the old faith. The Virgin and St. Joseph must really have been historical characters as their names appear in the New Testament. Even Renan did not try to disprove their existence although he did put up a fair argument against Jesus' divinity. He is now become vieux jeu and no one reads him anymore.

The people who are putting up these shrines must have the same reasons that their ancestors had when they took the time from their clearing of the stumps and rocks from their hillside farms to build the ones that still exist.

Many comments have been made about the lack of artistry to be found in the modern ones. Carrara marble is rather rare in these parts and Italian imports would be out of reach of most pocketbooks. One should look more at the sincerity of the faith that prompted the erection of these than at the plaster of Paris under the paint.

Although the directives of Vatican II filtered down to our level in the form of getting rid of statues from inside the church to make us better 'Christians', there must be a spiritual need in our makeup for wanting some outward form to our old beliefs... like keeping old family albums filled with our ancestor's pictures.

Nota bene: Recent headlines in the news seem to indicate that the Pieta in St. Peter's had not been carted to the Tiber!



The origin of the shrine at Lille

As told to A.J. Michaud, August 1972, by Mr. Jean Beaupré born in 1886.

It was either in 1891 or 1892. When we're five or six, we don't differentiate the years that much. It had snowed all winter long and the snow accumulation had become so high that when my father fell a large pine or spruce, although some shoveling had been done around the trunk of the tree, a tunnel still had to be dug to allow the team to pass under it.

For the logs had to be taken down from our steep back-farm lot and a path shoveled by my older brothers for the team of oxen to drag the eight-foot butts to a hard packed road where they would be later hauled to the lumber mill not too far from home. Pine and spruce were sawed into clapboard, cedar into shingles. This was prime lumber as there were no knots generally in the first two logs.

Winter was the best time to work on these operations for the finished product had to be crossed over the river to be loaded on the Canadian railroad. This railroad had been built about twenty years before and there were no outside connections to our own American communities. A generation would have to elapse before the Bangor and Aroostook railroad would reach our town.

No one will deny (at least one who has lived here a generation or so) that cold winters in this area are followed by very hot summers. The whole weather pattern has sudden changes such as hundred degree heat waves and very sudden drops of temperature.

These changes cause severe thunder storms and hailstorms or so it did in the past. Hail for a farming community such as ours just meant ruin, ruin to our grain, ruin to our potato and vegetable crops.

One old wit of the town said: It at least kills all the potato bugs! The last big hailstorm that I remember had hailstones as big as crabapples... at least an inch thick. When the sky suddenly became so dark that one thought that night was approaching, the schoolteacher brought all her students to our house. (School was held in the summer months in those days as no frame schoolhouse could be heated in the winter). I and my younger brother were building a child's fence in the yard. We were using edgings

from the mill to play fencemaking like we had seen our older brothers and father do in the spring.

So on this particular afternoon, it must have been two-thirty or so, we were surprised to see the older children with the teacher in the vanguard run towards our house. We had not noticed anything strange, so intense was I with my brother's ineptitude in fence building. Then we saw some dark clouds tumbling and rolling towards our house... and the fun was short-lived.

Bolts of lightning were striking everything. A continuous roar of thunder could be heard and then we heard the wind, the striking of the hail against the house. Windows broke... those towards the west. My mother lit a candle that had been blessed at Candlemas... "La Chandeleur". She threw salt in the stove... why? I still don't know... and we all knelt down to say a few Hail Mary's. It seemed to be the end of the world.

The whole storm may have lasted ten minutes at the most but it seemed an eternity to us. Where the hail had broken the windows there were water puddles on the floor. Hail had accumulated on the side of the house to a depth of over a foot.

Chickens lay dead in the yard. The calves had survived as they were penned on the eastside of the barn. My mother's favorite milk cow had been hit by lightning. When we noticed her in back of the barn she was already swelling up.

Of course, it was only days afterwards that we noticed broken branches severed from immense spruce trees. Hail had severely pitted the bark. In years to come we were able to chop off large burls of gum that had covered these pits made by the hail. Spruce gum was not unknown to us but always in small quantities that our father brought back either from his own lumbering on the farm or when he went to the lumber camps up river. For several years... 'après l'année de la grêle'... we enjoyed a continuous supply of this delicacy from our own private forest.

We children only saw the benefits of the storm. The hail had not yet stopped when we were picking the dead chickens that had been struck by the hail and had not had the time to take to cover. We chopped their heads off and were thinking of the stews or roasts that the following days would bring. The school children were even throwing hailstones at each other as if they were snow balls.

Our oats crop was ruined. Oats were important in those days not only for the grain that was used to fatten hogs or cattle but the straw was fed to most cattle like cows, oxen, and sheep. At least one meal a day of straw was fed. Good hay and clover were rare.

Oxen were kept long after the usage of the horse was appreciated for its intelligence and its power to pull because oxen could be wintered practically on straw. (As an aside oats were cut in those days in the milk-stage and had more nourishing ingredients than our modern product has.)

So the hail-flattened straw was cut with a sickle, raked, and dried for winter fodder. The only grain saved was a patch of buckwheat at the very rear of the farm. It was surrounded by tall trees and the wind and the hail in some mysterious way had overlooked it.

Our pastor, Monsieur l'Abbé Richer, had nearly perished as he was caught in the same storm while returning from Violette Brook. He had driven his horse and buggy in the lee of the Zéphirin Daigle barn during the worse part of the storm.

Apparently these hailstorms had been occurring periodically. The priest realized that if his parishioners were to survive in their agricultural enterprise that some celestial force would have to be used. The next Sunday he announced that only God could help us. We had to show our faith in Him in some tangible way. His only Son had saved the world by the sign of the cross on which He died. If we erected crosses where hail had hit the hardest, these would alleviate the severity of these calamities and he guaranteed us against their recurrence.

During the week he visited the whole parish and decided on the different places where hail had caused the most damage. At each of these places a cross was placed at the side of the road to remind people to say a prayer when they went by.

One of these crosses still stands on the Louis Ouellette farm, another on what used to be called the Jos Morin farm near the intersection to the former main road from the Lavertu Settlement. This last cross has long disappeared. The one on the Ouellette farm was renovated by the late Zéphirin Madore in the early twenties.

A stone weighing about five hundred pounds was used as a base. Holes were drilled to insert steel hand-wrought shafts in which the standard of the cross could be inserted

and bolted. As this cost a few dollars he had asked the section (railroad) hands to contribute towards this expense. I remember giving one dollar as my share.

You've asked me the reason why I remember these facts so well. I shall have to return to the time when I was but five or six years old. I'm positive that I was not old enough to go to school. I remember the last storm that hit our home but what stands out in my mind more than anything else is one small incident that happened the afternoon that the crosses or shrines were blessed. It was early August... just about the time of the month that these severe storms would hit our Valley.

That particular Sunday my mother had dressed me in my best homespun suit. All who could get in the family buggy had gone to Vespers. The benediction of the shrines would follow that weekly Sunday ceremony. We, being too young to understand what really was going on at these church affairs, were left home. We were told to be around when the whole congregation would drive by later in the afternoon for the official blessing for the first shrine was not very far from our house.

Did you ever stand in your Sunday best for a whole hour at the age of five or six? The river was nearby. The garden after the rains was full of barnyard tackle.

I convinced the neighbor's boy, who happened to be my cousin, and my sister to go fishing to while away the time and perhaps to catch enough trout for supper. There were trout in the river in those days. My sister and I stayed in a boat tied to a stake on the shore. My cousin who was older took another boat to a log about twenty feet away. Of course my sister stayed at the end of the boat nearer shore but I went to the other end.

My cousin was catching some nice ones near the boom. I got a bite but I missed. I was too anxious. On the second bite I yanked so hard that I toppled over in the water. It had felt like a big fish... but there I was in very deep water. I feared that I would drown.

I began to walk on all four at the bottom of the river. - Pretty soon I could reach for wood edgings coming from the mill. I tried to stand up and my head came out of the water, all this while my sister was yelling to my cousin to come to my rescue... but all I really did was walk to the shore and got a good wetting.

Now what to do? We could hear the bell announcing the end of Vespers and the whole congregation soon would be

coming our way. I was dripping. I ran home. My wardrobe was quite limited. I put on last winter's shoepacks and my daily pants and shirt. I waited willy nilly for my folks to pick me up to continue to the blessing. I knew that I would have plenty of explaining to avoid a spanking. My sister looked good. She had not gotten wet.

The wetting and the fear of a good spanking enshrined in my mind the blessing of the shrines in the parish of Mont Carmel. All this occurred nearly eighty years ago. Do you know that we have never had any serious damage from hail ever since?

I also sometimes wonder whether the expression that we use around here "Ca ne peut pas être pire que la grêle" could not have originated at that time.



Obsolete French Valley Words



It is surprising to note how many French expressions used along the Valley fifty years ago have now lost all their meaning to the younger generation. Many more which we now have would also be meaningless to people who lived in 1900. Would this prove that our language, quaint to the ears of "educated" strangers, is in fact a living language?

It can delete or incorporate (as the need arises) phrases, new idioms, changes in the meanings of perfectly good French words through changes in our economic life or progress in our technology. Evolution in our social life changes the original meanings that our ancestors have

given them. During the past two weeks I have tried the following at our local grocery store and have been met with the question: What gives? What do you mean? "Du lard anglais"... salted pork fat that people bought at stores when the supply of salted pork on the farm ran out. As it was produced in the outside world, presumably by English speaking people, it was called "lard anglais." It is utilized in baking beans, in soups, particularly pea soup. In the past slices of it were eaten cold in the form of a sandwich. It was wrapped in a buckwheat pancake.

A generous chunk of this salt pork was used in roasting beef, hens, and wild rabbits as these were considered too lean to be cooked alone. Of course, all these roasts were cooked in a black cast-iron pot. This pork fat would help in the browning of the potatoes.

"Une ronde de lard." This would seem to indicate that these large chunks of fat would be circular in shape, but they were not. The large chunks were generally placed against the staves of the barrel first in the process of salting. A slight curvature would develop on the rind of these outside pieces.

"De la farine à corps ou de la farine de corps." Either expression was used depending on the locality. "Corps" in the Valley always meant barrel as well as the human body. When a farmer took his wheat to the gristmill, the flour that he brought back home was always referred to as "de la farine de blé"

If he bought, however, wheat flour from the store, this flour would be called "de la farine de corps" as he always bought it by the barrel. The modern housewife in 1912 had to own a new gadget... a small steel platform, placed on a pivot, on which the barrel was rolled by her man. Then she could easily pull the barrel from under the cooking area. No more traveling to the pantry to get her flour to bake bread.

"Quartron"... generally used in such expressions as "un quartron d'épice"... just meant a quarter of a pound.

"Trente sous" meant twenty-five cents.

"A hue et a dia"... or as it was pronounced a hue, a jia: Interjection used when directing a well-trained team of oxen. Hue meant right; dia or jia meant left. Of course this disappeared when oxen disappeared. Look up your Larousse, boys and girls, as it's very good French.

"Monter en l'air" is never used anymore for "Monter en haut."

"Courir la gallipotte" is also forgotten. It meant your consorting with certain ladies who used rouge! "Déclassées" to say the least!

Forty years ago the word "échelle" (ladder) was invariably used for "escalier" (stair, staircase)... a remnant of the primitive dwellings that were in the Valley when one had to use a ladder to climb to the loft or second story.

"Hardes", another good French word, has totally disappeared from our vocabulary. Its meaning had been somewhat changed in the expression "Hardes de dimanche" but it was used with its original meaning too... common, ordinary clothing.

As we incorporate more English in our "lingua Madawaska", the old French disappears, or does it appreciably? "Amore-moi ça sur le dos du char." I'm certain that my great-grandfather would not have understood this last sentence... but we all do!



Different French Expressions

not found in the 'ould' country

The following articles will touch on some French expressions used in the St. John Valley. They will try to clarify some aspects of the character of the people more than serve as a basis for future studies of the language.

The first series will be on the multiplicity of expressing "plenty or more than enough."

In the second the meanings of such expressions as "ravage de chevreux" will be dealt with.

No native of France at his first contact with many of the above could possibly fathom their meaning and yet, when explained, they add a certain richness to our language as well as explain to the outsider many different facets of our character.

Is it because the people of the Valley had so little and were too proud to admit this penury that they devoted so much effort to express the little that they really possessed?

Each expression will be taken individually. Each class of people that commonly used it will be pinpointed.

Although everyone of us belongs to a democracy, it would form a very surprising and interesting study to see the number of classes... social, affluent, educated, poor, Irish, Scotch, English, Lebanese, Acadian, Canadian... that one would find along our beloved river.

If you are not bilingual, you may skip the following articles. An attempt will be made to keep them lively. An attempt will also be made to translate where translation will add to the content of the phrase or clarify the expression used.

This newspaper does not want to use expressions taken out of Lady Chatterley's Lover or Peyton Place. Any Anglo-Saxon word is frowned upon such as three letter words that may refer to the rear of a person's anatomy.

Quite a handicap when one wants to talk about such expressions as "maudit," "cochonnerie," "Plein mes culottes." In such cases there will be no translation. The expression will be "entre nous."

To arouse interest or to discourage it here is the list of the expressions:

J'en ai beaucoup.
J'en ai plein les deux mains.
J'en ai à plein.
J'en ai gros.
J'en ai une cochonnerie.
J'en ai qu'à savoir en faire.
J'en ai la moitié de trop.
J'en ai un saccage.
J'en ai en masse.
J'en ai une batée.
J'en ai en maudit.
J'en ai trop.
J'en ai plein mes culottes.
J'en ai en batège.
J'en ai plein mes bottes.
J'en ai plein mon casse.

There were variations to the above and the list has not been exhausted.

This language of ours is really something. If a Shakespeare were born amongst us, he really could go to town and make the Valley known as far south as Houlton!

An immense amount of water has gone down the Allagash, the St. John River since 1609 when this river was first used as the King's Highway... le chemin du roi... by 'les coureurs des bois.'

Of course this was all French territory over 300 years ago. There were no Pilgrims romping on Plymouth Rock at the time.

Unfortunately the French kings became so enamoured with their paramours that they lost interest in this world of ours. As an afterthought would the word fortunately be more appropriate?

And so the St. John River and its beautiful Valley have not been featured in the history of Maine. It is not part of the Maine Register of historic places like the Kennebec which has been designated as the Benedict Arnold Trail.

It is only appropriate that the language of the 'coureurs de bois' remain the language of 90 percent of the population; that after 200 years lovers still make their vows of eternal love in the same romance tongue and that little children still learn at their mothers' knees 'le Notre Père' in the same language.

J'en ai une cochonnerie

The first three expressions mean in the vernacular that a person has a lot. They were used by the clergy, the semi-literate, the prudish.

They do not come from the guts of the people, from the soil, from the smells of the barnyard, from the Norman conquest of France, the forest, the *coureurs de bois*. They are more or less a form of expression that a person will use to boast, to try to make himself out a little better than his neighbor.

But the fourth is worth talking about, "J'en ai une cochonnerie." It is untranslatable if one wants to bring out its savor, its earthiness, its implications of the bounty of reproduction. It is redolent of mother nature reproducing itself a thousandfold to alleviate the scarcity of food.

Rabelais in the sixteenth century could have coined it. It is not below Chaucer's vocabulary.

The upper classes of the Valley might hesitate to use it but would be conversant with it and definitely know its meaning. It is an expression that would be very commonly used by the *oi polloi*, *le peuple*, the people.

It means to them that they have so much of something that they do not know what to do with it at the moment. It does not necessarily mean that whatever it is that they have will go to waste.

It means that they have a superabundance of a multitude of things. It is used like this: *J'ai une cochonnerie de livres. J'ai une cochonnerie de jardinage.*

The person using this expression will undoubtedly offer you part of this abundance of string beans, radishes or whatever there is at the time overproducing. It puts the receiver in the position that he is seemingly doing a favor to the giver by accepting the gift.

When this rapport can be established between the giver and the receiver, this is indeed true Christian charity. It does not compare to the monthly recertification necessary to receive surplus food required by our bureaucratic system of doling out food.

When a record is kept of the cheese, canned meat, etc. that one receives, the stigma of poverty is so evident that many proud people will not participate in the program. The government may have 'une cochonnerie' of food but the giving of it does not evoke the same feeling in the

receiver that was previously mentioned.

The word 'cochonnerie' in the Valley has two definite meanings. Its first meaning has been explained above.

How it came to have that meaning is a matter of conjecture. However, if one can visit an old-fashioned barnyard and be fortunate enough to see a sow with a litter of 12 'piglets', nuzzling a noon luncheon on a warm day in the month of June, one's imagination can easily do the rest.

Go back in three weeks and observe the same scene. The small pigs have more than tripled in size. Visions of walking hams, chops, spareribs will arise. Six months later the 'cute' darlings now weigh over 200 pounds and are ready for the market. Over a ton of meat is ready for a dissertation on roast pork out of a single 'cochon'.

This promise of a future superabundance can have influenced the meaning that we give to the word from such observations. If a local artist should ever draw a cornucopia, the head of a pig should be drawn coming out of it. One does not feed on vegetables alone in the winter months. Salt pork and white bacon should be placed on the table once in a while.

Larousse and 'le petit Robert', both authorities on the meaning of words in the French language, do not include the above-mentioned meaning. Both were brought up far from the Valley in the piggeries of Paris where they developed certain biases as to the neatness of the pig and give the meaning of the word 'cochonnerie' as filth, dirt, beastliness, obscenity in language.

Some of this meaning of the word has survived in our local language in such expressions as "Quelle cochonnerie que je viens de faire!" This can be translated to: What a mess I've just made... like spilling a can of paint on an indoor carpet.

That does represent something that should not be there but of itself is not dirt or filth when put in its proper place as on a wall. Even there we have disassociated the authorities' meanings from the word as we had observed the cleanliness of the hog if this same animal is given half a chance to keep clean. Given a bundle of straw to make its own bed and a little room to move about, it will never defecate or urinate in its sleeping quarters. It will keep itself cleaner than a cow.

Animals... all animals have by instinct a sense of

cleanliness that is hard to find in human beings at times. Look what has been done to the Saco River, the Merrimack, the Hudson, the Pilgrims' own backyard in the waters around Boston, Raritan Bay in New York Harbor!

There one finds 'une cochonnerie' according to Larousse and 'le petit Robert.' (Even the people of Wiscasset will wake up some morning to find 'une cochonnerie' next to their green lawns, beautiful mansions, and historic museums).

'Cette cochonnerie' will have been made by the hand of man.



J'en ai un saccage

The rear lots of this valley used to be a series of living communities. People thrived there a hundred years ago. There was family life, rural life.

The shortest days of the year, the coldest and most depressing period of winter were changed to what one can recall as the longest and gayest part of the year.

This lasted ordinarily two weeks where the overabundance of the pork population was taken care of, when hundreds of "tourtières" were eaten by men, small fry like you and me, even by the youngest daughter of the richest farmer of the "canton" ... she not fearing to put on a few pounds that present day weight watchers so execrate!

And so we come to the expressions "J'en ai trop;" "J'en ai qu'à savoir en faire."

Both can qualify as belonging to all classes of people. There was in both a little face saving. Rarely at the time had one too much of anything.

"J'en ai la moitié de trop" can easily be included in the above. All of these expressions were coined to find a way to help people whom you thought were in a worse plight than you.

Thus the variety of expressions. These expressions seem to spring from a desire of giving. Of course it was

only natural that if those same people would ever have more than they actually needed at some future date, they would reciprocate. They would usually do so.

It was a way of life, a primitive way of sharing what the earth had in its own unpredictable way given a little more than one expected from it.

Traces of this way of life can still be found in the valley for all these expressions are still being used and the giving and the sharing are part of us. Is it the result of 300 years of inbreeding and heredity?

"J'en ai un saccage" does require a little historical research or at least some consultations in a dictionary to clarify its meaning.

Le petit Robert (which, of course, turns out to be a very thick French dictionary), defines SACCAGER: "Mettre à sac, au pillage, en détruisant et en volant."

All that this means is that to "saccager" is to pillage, destroy, and steal. And who had done a great deal of that in the past? Just all our ancestors about the year 900.

We came from the north of Europe. The winters were long. Werewolves were screaming outside our earth banked huts. Our children were born on tepid straw in half lit hovels where the smoke escaped through the roof. (These were, perhaps, worse than an Indian wigwam).

To gather enough food to feed our growing families we learned to build boats and catch fish from the ocean next to our hovels.

Later we became expert boat builders. We adventured a few miles on that same ocean and caught more fish.

We became barterers and built larger boats from the sale of these same fish.

Our power of observation of the stars and sun soon made us adventure farther and we became expert sailors. We came to a large island that was inhabited by Anglos. We destroyed them. But our power of reproductions soon made that land too small for our progeny. We kept reproducing.

There was land farther south that seemed more attractive to our eyes. It was warmer. It was less foggy than the island. It seemed like a heaven to us, a Valhalla to the children of our hovels.

There was a river that went many miles inside that haven. Along the banks of this river there were beasts of burden that could be eaten. How this meat tasted good

compared to our fish diet!

There were precious stones and gold in somber buildings within sight of its banks. Such weak men defended these buildings and such riches did the walls of these buildings enclose!

And so we foraged this country that was ours by right of its productivity and the riches found inside of its buildings.

The people inhabiting these huge hovels did not feel the cold of the seasons. They had learned to build chimneys. But we were stronger than they were. They had lost their strength and we destroyed them.

We heard from their bards... singing folks... later on that in years gone by that they had done the same thing to the inhabitants who had been settled there. That did not concern us. We became the masters of this region. We were Normans. This world was ours.

Their priest would rave: Deliver us from Normans. But the land was good and we conquered its people. And we named it: Normandy.

We destroyed, we pillaged, we brought home in bags chalices of gold, of silver and then we decided that this place was warmer than our own climate and we stayed there with our women, their women, and we forgot our land.

SACCAGER MEANS TO BRING HOME RICHES IN BAGS. And when we have riches, bags of riches, we have "un saccage," a surplus of things to spread largesse around, to drink wassail with boon companions.

(Therefore when we in the valley say: J'en ai un saccage, we just mean that we have a hell of a lot and that we can afford to treat our friends, give something away, as we should in all Christian charity!)

Strange how we became converted to the conquered's religion. After all, it was not far different from ours. After death we always went to a better place where we could fight and be happy.

We soon became bishops in this new land. We even became popes whenever, in a sort of diplomatic way, we could in this new way of life, "saccager" our neighbors who had grown fat and weak. For it required gold pieces to become one of their popes.

Of course we were not satisfied to stay in this country. We became crowded according to our standards.

Our children eventually went to Naples, Sicily and to several places in a large sea which former races had called "Mare Nostrum." It was a good place to be. We did not need to build fires to warm our buildings.

Some of us always stayed in Normandy. We learned the language of the people who became our serfs. Throughout all these generations we loved the word "sac." We made a verb of it in "saccager" and whenever we had an abundance of anything, we used the word "saccage."



The meaning of "battée"

"Masse" means body, total possession, capital stock, heap, lump, hoard, bulk. So if one possessed something 'en masse,' one really was not practicing the vow of poverty or being altogether humble.

'Battée' is somewhat more difficult to explain from the best French sources. The word 'battée' means a pan to wash gold out of sand or soil. This could not apply to the valley. We may sometimes use a little blarney but we are not known to possess much gold. Coppers, yes! But gold, no!

Remembering that our ancestors have used many nautical terms and that we are still using many of them and also remembering that our ancestors loved to shorten words, the word 'batelée' came up for investigation.

'Batelée' means the whole load of a boat. If one had a boatload, certainly one could afford to give a little away. So perhaps, out of the expression of having 'une batelée,' someone changed or deleted the 'el' and we have what we have... a very expressive expression of largesse out of which we can give to a friend, to a person who may have much more than you do but from whom you may want to hide your own poverty.

The last motive for inventing all these expressions could also be paramount in our subconscious. Out of one's richness one gave; from out of one's own poverty one also parted.

'J'en ai en baptême' is also heard. Could it be that the

squeamish changed the above to 'batée?'

'J'en ai en maudit.' This smacks of the forest. It also smacks of the 'Québécois.'

'Maudit' when I was young, if we ever used it, was a word that we would confess as a most grievous sin. It was never, never heard around the house. It smelled of sacrilege. If one said this awful word, the devil might take immediate possession of your soul.

'Maudire son père ou sa mère' would have been then and should still be a most grievous sin. A father's malediction was tantamount to a life of unhappiness and ruin. But what father out of his love for his child would even think of damning his child?

This is straying too far afield and pages could be written on just the word 'maudit' but these lines are supposed to explain 'more than enough' in the valley.

This must have happened before 1900 when the young bucks would come out for a winter's sojourn in lumber camps and, wanting to appear more like men when they had tasted some of the concoctions brewed by amoral people who wanted to take in a few easy dollars, they would boast to their chums: "J'en ai bu en maudit."

It meant that they had gone over the limit, had lost their sense of reasoning, that they had had more than enough.

So today if you say 'J'en ai en maudit,' it means that you have had or have more than enough. (Personal: "J'en ai eu en maudit. I gave some away and there is still some for the family.")

Of course, nowadays, we may use the word 'damn' and not think anything of it. Still one never uses it on TV nor on the radio. It is still looked at askance in many milieus of our society. It is not proper in 'polite' society.

Although many people do not act as if they believed in hell, you can not damn them to hell.

They would be shocked, they would think you crude, and don't even go about boasting: Que vous en avez en maudit and that you want to dispense charity. It just isn't done nowadays.



The purpose underlying the writing of these articles was to demonstrate that our language could evolve, that it is a living and not a dead language, that, though it strays in many aspects, it could add to the richness of expression of the French language if it were ever considered.

The blending of the imagination of the people with its encounter with native fauna deserves to be studied by competent linguists.

If one calls the language of the valley a patois, one can as well designate the language used in the United States as **patois**.

American English is far different from England English. This small corner of the world wherein French is spoken is so minuscule that it could never have any far-reaching effect in France.

England has for several generations been importing many Americanisms although its grammarians are keeping an ever watchful eye on the barbaric expressions coming from America. The valley and the U.S. of America do not compare in size.

Another reason that prompted the writing of these articles was to upgrade the ego of some of our own people.

The different shades of meaning that have been added to such words as cochonnerie, saccage and batelée should not be wholly forgotten. As French is becoming a secondary language in our schoolyards and is heard less and less on the streets of our small towns, all these expressions will be forgotten in a generation's time.

If French is spoken then, it will be an academic French, expurgated of all the cultural and ethnic richness that over two hundred years of isolation have grafted to it ever since our ancestors landed at La Heve in 1632.

Even these articles are written in a language that is not heard at our mothers' knees. Its niceties were only appreciated in our late 'teens.'

Et puis on vient to "J'en ai plein mes culottes." "J'en ai en batège." "J'en ai plein mes bottes."

The above expressions mean more than enough but do not in a sense mean that a person has a surplus of any material that he may want to part with.

They are not translatable. Their diverse shades of meaning or nuances in expressing 'more than enough' can only be appreciated by a bilingual person of the valley.

The origin of 'plein mes culottes' is left to the

Imagination of the same person. The editorial board of the paper might not print whatever might be affirmed to be its origin.

It does not mean, however, that a person has undertaken some project that occupies all his waking hours and even impinges on his leisure.

If a person uses this expression, it is useless to ask him to do anything else. Enough is enough.

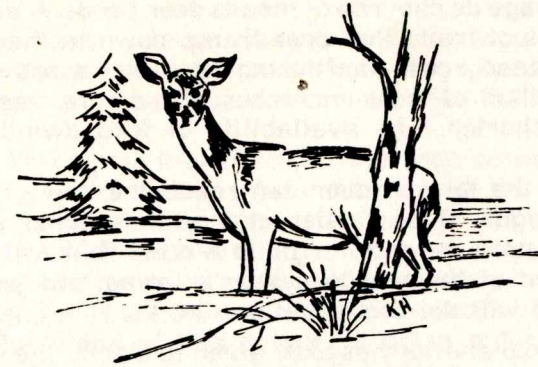
'Batège' is closely connected to 'bateau' or it could be a variant of 'batée.' Even there in such expressions as 'J'en ai en batège à faire,' it will mean a surplus of work not as one of material abundance.

'Plein mes bottes' has the same connotation as the above. The word 'bottes' was used instead of 'bottines' as the last was unknown at the time that the expression was coined. All footwear was made out of the hides of domesticated animals or of moose and caribou.

Shoemakers would go from house to house. Board and room would be a major part of their pay. They were always welcome for their coming meant evenings of entertaining stories about the neighborhood and distant places.

Again this shade of meaning can not be found in any dictionary used in modern France but just because it is not found in a dictionary, it does not exclude its usage in that country.

J'en ai plein mes bottes. This is the end.



Ravage de chevreux, ravage d'original

To the person who only has studied French in France (i.e. Academic French) or to a native of that country, these two expressions are practically meaningless. Still to a native of the Valley and particularly to the hunter no explanation is needed to clarify the above-mentioned expressions.

To the older residents who have had a chance of hearing tales about hunting in a "ravage de chevreux," these three words will bring memories of sweat and toil, memories of abundance in depleted winter larder.

Whenever there were abuses in such hunts, there will also be remembered bitter accusations of persons who did not take from these the amount of meat needed for their own families but slaughtered indiscriminately for commercial use.

The hunter who would kill every animal in a "ravage" or who would only salvage the hindquarters of a deer or moose would be condemned by his peers.

There would be a social ostracism practiced by the people of the settlement in which he lived and he would be pointed out as an example of moral turpitude that would later form part of the moral code of future hunters in the community.

Common sense dictated laws of conservation that at the time were more beneficial to the herd of wild animals than present state legislations.

"Ravage de chevreux" means deer yards. A deer yard is a series of trails that deer tramp down in the snow to reach their source of food during the winter months. As the accumulation of snow increases, these runs necessarily become shorter. The availability of food dwindles to a minimum.

Only the largest deer can reach the new growth of cedar boughs. If no sudden change in weather patterns comes to melt the snow or build a crust that will support the weight of the previous year's fawns and yearlings, these last will die of starvation.

This explanation has to be given to clarify the usage of the word "ravage" as applied to a deer yard by early settlers. (This word has continued down to our own day and, in modern parlance, is even being used to describe our own dooryards during such a winter as that of 1971-1972 when driveways become narrower and narrower).

When the accumulation of snow has reached 80 to 100 inches the food supply in these yards is so low that the word "ravage" was an apt one to be used to describe such a place.

Consequently, the word "ravage" was chosen to describe a place which showed complete despoliation. As such it is a much more meaningful word than yard is.

"Chevreux" in modern French is spelled "chevreuil" and is pronounced differently as a matter of course. But in the beginning of the seventeenth century or about the time that the first settlers came to Acadia this word was spelled "chevreul" and could very well be pronounced the way that it is today.

There has been speculation as to the origin of the word "original." Some have advocated that it was a shortened form of the word "original," meaning native to a particular country, but it is much more probable that the word is derived from the Basque word for the European elk... oregnac (plural oregna).

It should not be forgotten that Basque fishermen preceded Jacques Cartier to the shores of present day Nova Scotia and even antedated the discovery of the new world by Columbus.

To them these shores afforded shelter during storms, a source of fresh water and also a place to dry their cod during the short summer months.

To escape the flies, moose would frequent the

numerous bays in which Basque sailboats would be anchored. It was inevitable that these large beasts which were larger than deer would be called after the European elk.

The first times that French fishermen came to these shores must have been in joint ventures with the Basques. At the sight of these monstrous animals it would be only natural for the French to ask their Basque captains what they were and their answer would have been "oregnac."

Moose yards are different from deer yards but it is not within the scope of this article to bring out these differences. Ask your nearest game warden.

