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Franco-Ontarien Folksongs

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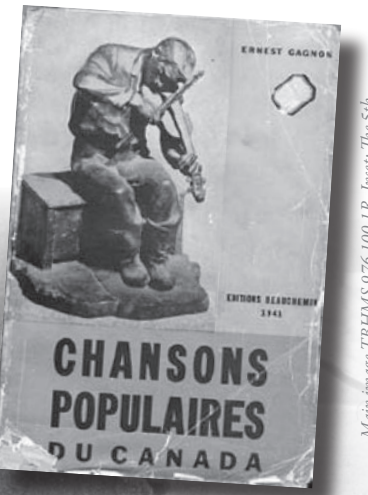
Résumé de l'article

Dans l'histoire orale, les collections de chansons folkloriques canadiennes-françaises, sont des sources importantes mais aussi complexes. Comme l'oeuvre fondatrice d'Ernest Gagnon, Chansons populaires du Canada, la collection de chansons franco-ontariennes rassemblée par Germain Lemieux est ainsi établie dans une perspective nationaliste. Cependant Lemieux améliore la méthodologie et les critères d'analyse de Gagnon en s'inspirant de l'approche historique et des techniques utilisées sur le terrain par Marius Barbeau. La collection rassemblée par Germain Lemieux est en fin de compte révélatrice de ce que fut la lutte pour la survivance des Franco-Ontariens dans le milieu du 19^{e} siècle. Aussi, et surtout, Germain Lemieux a réussi à préserver les différentes voix de ceux qui, composant et chantant, ont joué un rôle essentiel dans le commerce des fourrures en Amérique du Nord, les voyageurs et les coureurs de bois.

A Reservoir of Voices
Franco-Ontarien Folksongs

By Daniel Laxer



Main image TBHMS 976.100.1 R. Inset: The 5th edition of Ernest Gagnon's Chansons Populaires.

Folksongs preserve generations of non-literate history. The problem is that the information is encoded in a format unfamiliar to most historians. Folksongs are by definition transmitted orally and possess no definite authorship.[1] Yet music is perhaps the most durable of the oral arts, with rhythm, rhyme, and melody functioning as mnemonic aids, crystallizing sequences of information as long as the Illiad and the Odyssey.[2] It is important to recognize that folksongs are not sung in accordance with the printed sheet. Folksongs are variable; they are created and re-created collectively with a composite of old and new elements. The result is inevitably influenced by context: the setting, the participants, the purpose and occasion. These contextual factors from different periods are absorbed and passed down within the repertoire itself. This paper will explore ways of elucidating historical processes from the *Franco-Ontarien* collections of Germain Lemieux.

Because folksongs are an uncon-

[1] Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 1-3.

[2] Walter Ong writes that music may music may "act as a constraint to fix a verbatim oral narrative." Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 62; for rhythm see *ibid*., 35; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 16, 46; for a discussion of the Illiad and the Odyssey, see Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

Abstract

French Canadian folksong collections are complex sources of oral history. They contribute a valuable perspective to the limited documentation of the lumbering and fur trade eras. Similar to Ernest Gagnon's seminal Chansons populaires du Canada, Germain Lemieux's collections of Franco-Ontarien folksongs are presented alongside a nationalist agenda. Yet Lemieux improves upon Gagnon's methodologies and analysis, adopting the fieldwork techniques and historical approach established by Marius Barbeau. Lemieux's collection ultimately reveals much about the mid-twentieth century Franco-Ontarien struggle for survivance. Most importantly, it preserves the fragmented voices of coureurs de bois and voyageurs, men who sang and composed amongst the diverse peoples of the North American fur trade.

Résumé: *Dans l'histoire orale, les collections de chansons folkloriques canadiennes-françaises, sont des sources importantes mais aussi complexes. Comme l'œuvre fondatrice d'Ernest Gagnon, Chansons populaires du Canada, la collection de chansons franco-ontariennes rassemblée par Germain Lemieux est ainsi établie dans une perspective nationaliste. Cependant Lemieux améliore la méthodologie et les critères d'analyse de Gagnon en s'inspirant de l'approche historique et des techniques utilisées sur le terrain par Marius Barbeau. La collection rassemblée par Germain Lemieux est en fin de compte révélatrice de ce que fut la lutte pour la survivance des Franco-Ontariens dans le milieu du 19e siècle. Aussi, et surtout, Germain Lemieux a réussi à préserver les différentes voix de ceux qui, composant et chantant, ont joué un rôle essentiel dans le commerce des fourrures en Amérique du Nord, les voyageurs et les coureurs de bois.*

ventional source for historians, it is important to locate Lemieux's work historiographically before proceeding. Ernest Gagnon is the foundational figure in nineteenth-century French Canadian folk studies, yet uncertain methodologies and overtly nationalist explanations problematize his large collection of early transcriptions. Marius Barbeau revolutionized the discipline, collecting prolifically and replacing nationalism with methodological rigour and historical inquiry. Lemieux is an interesting combination of these two approaches. Virulently nationalist *and* methodologically astute, Lemieux's collection reveals much about *Franco-Ontariens* in the 1960s and '70s, as well as the pre-modern period when French Canadian *coureurs de bois* and voyageurs travelled the waterways of the *pays d'en haut* performing and modifying folksongs in groups that often included Aboriginal and British peoples. Lemieux's collection is a valuable resource for historians interested in the oral history of the fur trade as well as musical adaptation and cross-cultural expression.

Folklore has had a special relationship with nationalism since its inception in the early nineteenth-century. The publication of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* by the brothers Grimm in 1812 was conceived to promote an agenda of Germanic nationalism.[3] The name "folklore" itself

[3] See Louis L. Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978).

emerged as a conscious Anglo-Saxon alternative to the prevailing label "popular antiquities."[4] Scholars around Europe soon pursued their own folkloric studies, seeking to uncover "national character" by recording the oral traditions of peasants. However, nationalist intentions did not always coincide with historically valuable research. Nineteenth-century publications tend to be silent concerning the methodologies of collecting, revising, and editing material for publication, as well as locating or dating the information. The final result tends to present folklore of a timeless and completely anonymous nature, without specific documentation or a transparent methodology that could help historians assess the material.

Ernest Gagnon is considered French Canada's first significant folklorist, publishing a major volume of French Canadian folksongs in 1865 entitled *Chansons Populaires du Canada*.[5] The inspiration for this collection came from Gagnon's experience as a music student in France during the reign of Napoleon III, when Jean Jacques Ampère was organizing the first collections of French folksongs.[6] Gagnon's European training familiarized him with varieties of French folksong and enabled him to identify some of the material he found in Quebec. His collection consists of one hundred songs with lyrics and annotated sheet music, as well as occasional descriptions of the regions where he collected and some of the songs' origins in France. For example Gagnon states that *la Claire Fontaine,* which he considers the most popular French Canadian song, had "vient de Normandie."[7] Gagnon does not locate origins beyond the reaches of the French language, although we know from later work that many of his songs possess origins and distributions well beyond territories inhabited by French speakers.[8] This may have been the result of his nationalism, or perhaps merely due to the infancy of folk studies at the time. Instead of detailing his methodology, Gagnon merely claims to represent songs exactly as they were sung to him. This is certainly problematic, as transcription presents a whole host of methodological difficulties and inherent inaccuracies, particularly before the late nineteenth-century arrival of the phonograph.[9]

True to his era, Gagnon writes with

[4] William Thoms penned the term in 1846 to evade French influence. See Duncan Emerich, "'Folklore': William John Thoms," *California Folklore Quarterly* 5 (October 1946), 358.

[5] Ernest Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires du Canada,* fifth ed. (Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1908). Gagnon has been named Quebec's "first true folklorist," even though his collection consists exclusively of musical material. See Luc Lacourcière, "The Present State of French-Canadian Folklore Studies," *The Journal of American Folklore,* 74:294 (Oct.-Dec., 1961), 373-82.

[6] Lacourcière, "The Present State," 89.

[7] Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires,* xiii.

[8] The farthest Gagnon traces a song is to French speaking Switzerland. See *Ibid*., xi. Marius Barbeau undertook major efforts to re-examine and extend the study of origins through engaging in comparative analysis with collections made throughout Europe.

[9] This topic generated a long and lively discussion amongst ethnomusicologists. For an example, see Pandora Hopkins, "The Purposes of Transcription," *Ethnomusicology* 10:3 (Sep., 1966), 310-17.

Marius Barbeau renewed the study of French Canadian folksongs and initiated a methodological revolution in Canadian folkloric studies.

nationalist sentiments and explanations. He begins his introduction by emphasizing the "incalculable" number of "nos chansons," by which he means of course French Canadian folksongs.[10] He romanticizes the nature of the French Canadian repertoire, writing that each song "est un monument plus solide que les monuments de bronze ou de granit."[11] As a result, Gagnon rarely attempts to date the songs: they are durable "monuments" that were carried by the French wherever they travelled and settled. Gagnon offers an idealized concept of national authorship by stating "C'est l'oeuvre de ce compositeur insaisissable qu'on appelle *le peuple.*"[12] This explanation does not account for variations or differences. The unique history of each song, often possessing distinct features and many different versions, is explained away with generalizations concerning the entire body of songs. While problematic and somewhat degraded through nationalist explanations, Gagnon's collection of French Canadian folksongs remained the most significant in the field until Marius Barbeau began his work in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Marius Barbeau renewed the study of French Canadian folksongs and initiated a methodological revolution in Canadian folkloric studies. Barbeau was trained as an anthropologist, leaving Quebec on a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford from 1907 to 1910. At a meeting of the American Anthropological Association and the American Folklore Society in 1914 he met Franz Boas, who questioned him about French Canadian folklore and prompted his studies in that direction.[13] It seems likely that Boas' brand of "salvage anthropology" contributed to Barbeau's tireless accumulation of French Canadian folksongs over the following decades. Barbeau was a conscientious collector, using his back-

[10] Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires,* vii.

[11] *Ibid*., viii.

[12] *Ibid*., xv. This kind of statement was not unusual to nineteenth century folklorists. In their quest to define 'national character,' generalizations of authorship were often made. See Snyder.

[13] Lacourcière, "The Present State," 5.

ground in anthropology as the basis for methodological advances in fieldwork. His important article "The Field of European Folk-Lore in America" published in 1919 advocates changes to the discipline primarily through improvements in techniques of collecting and fieldwork documentation.[14] Barbeau critiques the carelessness of previous folklorists who neglected to inquire into local knowledge and history of folksongs and lore, stating that there is "no excuse" for non-descriptive and hasty sampling.[15]

Barbeau employed new techniques of inquiry while collecting folkloric material. This process led to a much better understanding of "the ultimate time and place of origin" of each piece.[16] Informants' explanations and descriptions assist in the classification process, enabling the folklorist to judge "the extent of family or group traditions and of foreign elements."[17] Barbeau warns about the inaccuracy of many existing collections that are based upon "simplified or 'doctored' transcriptions."[18] He advocates more transparent and systematic methods of transcription to uncover specific "traits and intricacies." These variations, he argues, may "manifest themselves as part of an archaic system of music formerly existing in Europe."[19] Barbeau would eventually argue that a large proportion of French Canadian music and lyrics originated in medieval Europe. While this assertion has been challenged,[20] Barbeau's work clearly benefits from the attempt to trace different versions and account for historical patterns of migration. For instance, Barbeau delineates the differences between the three original settlements of Québec proper, Trois- Rivières, and Montréal, with their establishment by different groups of immigrants from Normandy to the Loire River in the seventeenth-century.[21] Barbeau states that "the bulk of the imported traditions" arrived before 1673 with the initial stock of settlers, surviving along the St. Lawrence when they had all but disappeared in France.[22] Barbeau details his methods of recording on wax cylinders and carefully transcribing results into written form.[23] He presents biographies of his most valuable informants, for instance the eighty-year old Elizabeth Tremblay and the blind minstrel Louis

[4] Marius Barbeau, "The Field of European Folk-Lore in America," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 32 (April-June 1919), 185.

[15] *Ibid*., 195.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] *Ibid*., 196.

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] John Haines, "Marius Barbeau et le Moyen-Âge," *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture,* ed. by Gordon Smith (Gatineau: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008).

[21] Barbeau, "The Field of European Folk-Lore in America," 190.

[22] *Ibid*., 191.

[23] Marius Barbeau, *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec,* trans. Sir Harold Boulton and Sir Ernest MacMillan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), xviii.

Simard l'Aveugle.[24] Barbeau advocated anthropological fieldwork standards and historical inquiries, resulting in a methodological advancement that fostered greater detail and reliability in folksong collections.

The work of Marius Barbeau is remarkable for its absence of French Canadian nationalist sentiment. In contrast to Gagnon, Barbeau does not present jingoistic explanations or idealized notions of authorship. While Barbeau certainly possessed some nationalist motivations,[25] he studied widely and his work reflects the internationalist trajectory of his career. He became assistant editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1915, and the president of the American Folklore Society in 1918. In 1922 Barbeau began work in English Canada, becoming the founding Secretary of the Canadian Historical Association while collecting for the National Museum in Ottawa.[26] Unlike Gagnon, Barbeau traces the origins of French Canadian folksongs beyond French origins. For instance in his 1946 publication *Canadian Folklore: The French Folklore Bulletin,* Barbeau indicates that the song *Dame Lombarde* originated around the Lombard conquest of the sixth century when a northern Italian princess poisoned her husband by pouring serpent's venom into his wine.[27] The "folk canticle" of *Saint Alexis* is said to have originated in Asia Minor in the fourth century, entered Italy through the Port of Ostia, and made its way to France by at least the eleventh century.[28] Barbeau cross-references folksong databases to estimate dates of origin, for instance "*Le Mariage anglais* (probably about 1490), *Prince Eugène* (1526), *Le Prince d'Orange* (1507), *Les Trois Roses empoisonnés* (1599)."[29] In *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec* Barbeau traces in detail the origins and distributions of each folk song by consulting and comparing many different versions of each piece.[30] For example *Voilà La Récompense* is traced to the 'langue vulgaire' of eleventh century French literature.[31] Barbeau traces the song *L'âne de Jean* to folk repertoires all across Europe by comparing seventeen versions.[32] Barbeau illustrates his historical inquisitiveness by describing the medieval *jongleurs,* roaming singers and storytellers who would "commemorate events and illustrate customs" by composing and performing songs, not just in

[24] *Ibid*.

[25] Haines, "Marius Barbeau," 188.

[26] Renée Landry and Denise Ménard, "Barbeau, Marius" in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* online <www.canadianencyclopedia.ca/index.cfm?PgNm=TVE&Params=U1ARTU000198>, retrieved 10 December 2007.

[27] **Marius Barbeau,** *Canadian Folklore: The French Folklore Bulletin* (New York: The French Folklore Society, 1946), 2.

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] *Ibid*., 3.

[30] Barbeau, *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec,* 18-20.

[31] *Ibid*., 44.

[32] *Ibid*., 159-60.

France but throughout Europe.[33] The *jongleurs* are contrasted with the *troubadours* and *trouvères,* who typically performed for a more refined and courtly audience. Marius Barbeau worked for extended periods outside of Quebec, promoting a comparative and historical approach that traced origins well beyond national or linguistic boundaries.

In the mid-twentieth century, Germain Lemieux collected approximately six hundred folksongs around Sturgeon Falls, Verner, and Sudbury, Ontario.

Barbeau's work had a far-reaching intellectual and institutional influence. In the 1920s Barbeau attracted the following of several important scholars including E.Z. Massicotte, Evelyn Bolduc, Gustave Lanctôt, and Adélard Lambert, all of whom began collecting French Canadian folksongs with Barbeau's methodologies.[34] In the 1930s Barbeau attracted Joseph-Thomas Leblanc, François Brassard and Luc Lacourcière, with Lacourcière going on to found Laval University's *Les Archives de Folklore* in 1944.[35] Laval University developed an important folklore program, with classes geared towards fieldwork methodology, transcribing, classifying, library research, and folk arts.[36] In many ways Laval's folklore program can be seen as the institutionalization of Marius Barbeau's ideals and initiatives.

It is in this context that Father Germain Lemieux received his training. He first attended the Séminaire de Gaspé, then decided to pursue a career as a Jesuit priest, and afterwards became a professor at the Collège du Sacré-Coeur de Sudbury.[37] He began studying *Franco-Ontarien* folklore in the Sudbury region in 1948 when asked by the Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario.[38] Over the next ten years he collected approximately 600 songs around Sturgeon Falls, Verner, and Sudbury. By 1953 he had published two initial collections[39] and began at-

[33] *Ibid*., vi.

[34] Lacourcière, "The Present State," 377.

[35] *Ibid*; Conrad LaForte, "Archives de Folklore," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada,* <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0000103,> retrieved 12 December 2007.

[36] Lacourcière, "The Present State," 377.

[37] "Profil biograhique: Germain Lemieux, 1914-," *Ressources frano-ontariennes,* <http://www.ropfo.ca/rfo/lemieux.html>, retrieved 15 December 2007.

[38] Denise Ménard, "Lemieux, Germain," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada,* <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0002036>, retrieved 13 December 2007.

[39] Germain Lemieux, *Folklore franco-ontarien: chansons,* 2 vols. (Sudbury: Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1949-50).

tending Laval University in Québec City, receiving his MA in history in 1955 and his PhD in Canadian Studies in 1961.[40] Lemieux worked under Luc Lacourcière, and his doctoral thesis took the form of a comparative monograph concerning the folktale "*Placidas* (Eustacius)."[41] In 1959 Lemieux was appointed director of the Institut de folklore in Sudbury (renamed the Centre *Franco-Ontarien* de folklore in 1975) and continued collecting from the Ottawa Valley to Sault Ste. Marie, eventually securing over 3,000 recordings. In the early 1960s he received a number of grants from the Canada Council to transcribe and codify the institute's recorded collections. It is from this work that Lemieux published *Chanteurs Franco-Ontariens et leurs chansons* in 1963 as well as the two volume *Chansonnier Franco-Ontarien* in 1974.[42]

These middle decades of the twentieth century were transitional for French Canadians. Starting in the 1950s and early 1960s there began a fundamental shift regarding French Canadian nationalism. Unlike Henri Bourassa's concepts that emphasized the two founding peoples of Canada, the emerging nationalism centered solely on the province of Quebec. With this shift, French language rights across Canada became jeopardized. Marcel Martel notes that as support for the nation-wide institutional framework diminished, it led to widespread concern for French cultural and linguistic survival outside of Quebec.[43] Of course, French Canadian leaders resisted assimilation. They attempted to revitalize the institutional base that united French speakers across the country with organizations such as the Fédération des francophones hors Québec.[44] The fundamental shift that was occurring in French Canadian nationalist thought was resisted among minority French populations across the country, with "the leaders of French-speaking Ontario [acting as] the most vocal opponents."[45]

This context helps explain the nationalist sentiments that are found in Lemieux's publications. His 1963 publication *Chanteurs Franco-Ontariens et leurs chansons* is a rather short introductory pamphlet that details and promotes the folklore program at the University of Sudbury as well as the l'Institut de Folklore.[46] It presents brief descriptions of the most common genres in the *Franco-Ontarien* repertoire, for instance the *chanson de voyageurs, chanson de table*, and *chanson à boire*, to name a few.[47] Le-

[40] Ménard, "Lemieux, Germain."

[41] Lacourcière, "The Present State," 378.

[42] Germain Lemieux, *Chanteurs Franco-Ontariens et leurs chansons* (Sudbury: Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1963); Germain Lemieux, *Chansonnier Franco-Ontarien* 2 vols. (Sudbury: Centre *Franco-Ontarien* de folklore, 1974).

[43] Marcel Martel, *French Canada: An Account of its Creation and Break up, 1850-1967* (Ottawa, The Canadian Historical Association, 1998), 26.

[44] Soon renamed Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. *Ibid*.

[45] *Ibid*., 25.

[46] Lemieux, *Chanteurs Franco-Ontariens et leurs chansons*, 11-18.

[47] *Ibid*., 21-29.

mieux characterizes the *Franco-Ontarien* ancestral folksong repertoire as possessing "la jovialité à la variété," "la taquinerie fraternelle," and "l'esprit chrétien."[48] While there are indeed many religious songs in the repertoire, Lemieux is heavy-handed in his assertions of Francophone religiously piety, writing "nous rappelle que notre peuple a été profondément religieux."[49] Lemieux presents his main goal as preserving oral culture and propagating the memory of the past, but he is explicit that this should be used to enrich and instruct those in the present. He writes of the "précieux cadeau qui nous vient des ancêtres matière dont ils ont hérité de leurs parents et qu'ils ont léguée après l'avoir enrichie de leur expérience personnelle et remodelée selon leurs talents et leur esprit."[50] Lemieux asserts that folksongs are "une source de fierté, un bain d'énergie patriotique."[51] History is called upon to provide a model and to stoke nationalist sentiments: "En chantant nos joies et nos peines dans le mode ancestral, nous réintégrons cette âme française qui, en se canadianisant, devint celle des laborieux défricheurs, des joyeux découvreurs, des malheureux déportés et des lutteurs persévérants."[52] Lemieux is interested in classifying material and probing historical origins, but he is also explicit about his nationalist agenda.

Lemieux's major body of folksongs was published in the 1974 collection *chansonnier franco-ontarien*. He states that his ultimate goal is to rekindle French Canadian patriotism in his region:[53]

> Nous voudrions que nos veillées familiales, nos cercles sociaux, nos écoles, nos camps de vacances, utilisent le répertoire ancestral pour chanter leur bonheur, leur espoir, eur regrets et même leur tristesse. Ce receuil voudrait redonner à notre population cette fierté patriotique dont débordait nos ancêstres dans leurs randonnées, leurs travaux ou leurs délassements de groupe.

He argues that folksongs demonstrate "la vigueur culturelle de notre groupe ethnique."[54] Emphasizing music's emotional appeal, Lemieux writes that "une chanson bien choisie et bien interprétée est une leçon d'art et de fierté nationale pour tout le groupe qui l'a entendue."[55] History is again used for inspiration, as he highlights the trajectory of folk material from France, to French Canada, and finally to French Ontario.[56] The importance of local variations is emphasized, as Lemieux asserts "Sachons profiter de notre Romancero local pour développer notre fierté nationale . ."[57] Instead of por-

[48] *Ibid*., 8.
[49] *Ibid*., 19.
[50] *Ibid*., 7.
[51] *Ibid*., 8.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 1, 1.
[54] *Ibid*., 3.
[55] *Ibid*., 25.
[56] *Ibid*., 11.
[57] *Ibid*., 3.

traying regional specimens as backwater oddities, he writes that the relative isolation of French Ontario led to a process of creative selection and vibrant adaptation of the old French repertoire. Lemieux's objectives are clear and determined: he intends to spark nationalist sentiment through the publication of folksongs that are particular to the local community and also heir to the long heritage of French Canada and France.

Lemieux's language is strongly nationalist and his objective is to promote *survivance*. He states repeatedly in his introduction that he intends to transmit traditional French folksongs to a new generation: "Le but de ce recueil est, avant tout, de rendre à notre jeune population une partie du répertoire des pionniers."[58] Lemieux argues that adequate knowledge of the ancestral folksong will lead to the preservation, adaptation and expansion of the French Canadian folksong repertoire: "Il prendrea conscience de cette source d'inspiration que tout jeune écrivain, poète ou musicien, pourrait exploiter pour produire une nouvelle pièce marqée du charactère national."[59] Lemieux's cries for the rekindling and rejuvenation of French culture were commonplace for French Canadians residing outside of Quebec in the 1960s and '70s.

Lemieux does not present *Franco-Ontarien* folksongs as timeless "monuments" or as the product of an exclusively French-speaking history. He writes that the most distinctive feature of the repertoire is the voyageur songs, many possessing Aboriginal influence. He describes distinctively local material "de provenance indienne ou française, ses complaintes locales, certains refrains à teintes étrangères."[60] Lemieux regards highly the songs commemorating the valourous and heroic deeds of voyageurs: "Les pauvres "voyageurs" en danger de mourir à la drave ou aux mains des Indiens servirent de thèmes à des chansons bien canadiennes."[61] These songs are marked by their sad melodies in the minor key and monotonous rhythms.[62] For Lemieux, the voyageur experience most defines the French Canadian folk repertoire in general; as he puts it, "la chanson de voyageurs est probablement l'élément le plus caractéristique de notre folklore authentiquement canadien."[63] The repertoire grew during long journeys through the *pays d'en haut,* as *coureurs des bois* and voyageurs adapted, improvised, and composed together, eventually carrying their new songs home. On these journeys there were significant interactions with Aboriginal peoples, generally through cooperation and trade, but occasionally as hostile enemies. Lemieux suggests that the threat of death influenced many of the best songs in the repertoire.[64]

Another important venue of musical

[58] *Ibid*., 1.
[59] *Ibid*., 25.
[60] *Ibid*., 10.
[61] *Ibid*., 16
[62] *Ibid*., 19
[63] *Ibid*., 18.
[64] *Ibid*., 15.

transmission and adaptation occurred in the lumbering era that began in the early nineteenth-century. There was undoubtedly a substantial degree of continuity between the musical culture of the voyageurs and that of the lumberjacks. Indeed, many voyageurs employed by the NWC eventually turned to lumbering, particularly after the 1821 merger with the HBC.[65] Unlike the canoe brigades, singing did not provide communal rhythm and synchronicity for the labour of the *bûcherons* and *raftsmen*. Instead, the lumbering camps offered an incredibly diverse working environment of Irish, English, American, Scottish, and Aboriginal men living in close quarters and frequently engaging in the pastimes of music and dance.[66] As with the voyageurs, the songs that survive from this era often represent the polyglot compositions of a diverse working class rather than culturally "pure" or historically "timeless" French productions.[67] In discussing the origins of the *Franco-Ontarien* repertoire, Lemieux distinguishes himself from Gagnon and Barbeau by emphasizing plurality as a marker of distinctiveness.[68]

A diverse voyageur crew at Fort William. The folksong repertoire grew during long journeys through the pays d'en haut*, as* coureurs des bois *and voyageurs adapted, improvised, and composed together. Courtesy Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 972.2.320.*

Included with each song is information gathered from the informant. Some descriptions are rather vague and provide few details concerning where and when

[65] Donald MacKay, *The Lumberjacks* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 28; David Lee, *Lumber Kings & Shantymen: Logging, Lumber and Timber in the Ottawa Valley* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2006), 80.

[66] Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 32-34; MacKay, 28, 240-47.

[67] The earliest voyageur songs containing Aboriginal words are dated to the eighteenth-century. See Marius Barbeau, "Voyageur Songs of the Missouri," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin,* 10:3 (Apr. 1954), 336-350. Grace Lee Nute identifies a voyageur song containing a French verse and an English chorus. See Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur* (1931; repr. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1955), 31. Similarly, English words are found scattered throughout Lemieux's collection of voyageur and lumbering songs.

[68] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 1, 9-10.

songs were learned. For instance the song "Sort de Vieille Fille" was obtained from Adjutor Paré in 1966 when he was seventy years old, and he learned it "tout jeune, dans sa famille, à Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré."[69] Other informants provide more information: Joseph Saint-Jules learned "Départ de la Fille-Soldat" from Louis Boyer in Sault-Sainte-Marie in 1930.[70] Some songs are traced back to the nineteenth-century, as Mme Arthur Parent learned "La Mort du Voyageur" in the 1890s from her mother Adéline Cloutier, who was born in 1840.[71] Although Lemieux does not concern himself with the scholarly task of tracing origins to medieval and early modern Europe, he does adopt Marius Barbeau's fieldwork methodologies. Informants provide place names, dates, and details concerning who and where they learned each song. Historians could determine changes over time and space with this information, through comparative analysis with the collections of Barbeau and his disciples.

The assumption of Lemieux is that his twentieth-century informants retained and preserved components of a much older repertoire. Indeed, Lemieux claims to provide a musical representation of the past, particularly voyageur singing in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century fur trade. The best idea we have of what the voyageurs actually sang in the canoe brigades comes from the Ermatinger collection, whose eleven songs were transcribed between 1827 and 1828 on the HBC's York Factory express brigade between the Hudson Bay and the Pacific.[72] The paddling songs of the voyageurs virtually always possess a 2/4 or 6/8 time signature.[73] They consist of a solo verse alternating with a group chorus. The verse is made up of rhymed couplets sung by individual voyageurs, whereby each first line is the previous singer's last. In this manner the verse slowly advances forward with each new singer. Perhaps the most important element demonstrated by the Ermatinger collection is that the voyageur verse follows a single rhyme/assonance scheme called a *laisse.* The *chansons de geste* recorded in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries were a recitative form of epic poetry comprised of a sequence of *laisses.*[74] With the paddling songs of the voyageurs, a single *laisse* typically defines an entire verse.[75] That each couplet had

[69] *Ibid*., 70.

[70] *Ibid*., 73.

[71] *Ibid*., vol. 2, 43.

[72] Marius Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830)," *Journal of American Folklore* 67 (April-June 1954), 147-61; *Edward Ermatinger's York Factory Express Journal, Being a Record of Journeys Made Between Fort Vancouver and Hudson Bay in the Years 1827-1828* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1912).

[73] Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830)."

[74] As Alan Hindley and Brian Levy explain, "The Old French epic thus begins to form itself into a sequence of strophes called *laisses* each with its own vowel-assonance: as the name implies, the lines of each group are 'leashed' together by this common assonance." Alan Hindley & Brian J. Levy, *The Old French Epic: An Introduction* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1983), X.

[75] The only exceptions in the Ermatinger collection are "*Le Rossignol Y Chante*" which has three

to conform to a unified rhyme scheme allowed an entire brigade of voyageurs to rotate through solo singers, repeating the previous soloist's last line and contributing another to complete the rhymed couplet, slowly advancing the narrative over the long distances and durations.

Let us investigate whether the voyageur songs from Lemieux's collection fit this model. A few actually contain the word "voyageur" in their lyrics. "Les Buveurs, Les Voyageurs" is one such song that possesses the jovial chorus "Les buveurs, les voyageurs sont toujours de bonne humeur!"[76] True to form, this song is in a 6/8 time signature and alternates between a verse and a chorus. However, instead of a rhymed couplet alternating with a chorus, four lines of verse alternate with a chorus. Thus the solo singer would sing two rhymed couplets back to back, without the uniformity of a single *laisse*. For example, the second verse:[77]

> Quand je suis près de ma catin,
> Présentez-lui un verr' de vin.
> Présentez-lui de la liqueur,
> Ça lui rafraîchira le coeur!

This song possesses most qualities of voyageur songs, but its verse is more protracted than those of the Ermatinger collection. On the other hand, the song "La Mort du Voyageur" is not a paddling song at all, but rather a *complainte*.[78] These were sung outside of the paddling context, often commemorating a tragic event or recounting a sad narrative.[79] *Complaintes* typically have a longer verse and a slower tempo. Each stanza of "La Mort du Voyageur" is five lines, and rather than a single *laisse* rhymed couplet, each stanza of verse contains multiple rhyme schemes.

There are, however, many songs in Lemieux's collection that accord well with the voyageur paddling repertoire. There are numerous versions of what is generally accepted to be the most popular voyageur song: "Trois Beaux Canards," otherwise known as "En Roulant ma Boule," or "V'la Bon Vent," depending on the chorus.[80] Claude Prey examined hundreds of variations of this song for his PhD thesis at Laval University entitled "Formation et Métamorphoses d'une chanson: *le Canard blanc.*"[81] Lemieux offers seven variations, all possessing the same verse characterized by a single *laisse,* as well as the basic structure that alternates rhymed couplet with chorus.[82] Some of these new choruses refer

rhyme / assonance endings, and "*Mes Blancs Moutons Garder*" which briefly deviates from the *laisse.* See Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830)," 155, 160.

[76] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 2., 36-37.

[77] *Ibid*., 37.

[78] *Ibid*., 42.

[79] Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 87; Johann Georg Kohl, *Kitchi Gami: Life among the Lake Superior Ojibway* (1859; repr. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), 260-61.

[80] Marius Barbeau, *En Roulant Ma Boule: Deuxième partie du Répertoire de la chanson folklorique française au Canada* (Ottawa: Musées Nationaux du Canada, 1982), 13-23.

[81] Conrad Laforte, *Survivances Médiévales dans la Chanson Folklorique* (Quebec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1981), 66.

[82] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 1, 80-85; *Ibid*., vol. 2, 44-49.

explicitly to paddling, for instance "Nous remerons tous tour à tour, nous ramerons tous ensemble!"[83] Another seems to possess British influence: "La ré-zi-gne zign' boum boum boum boum: Victoria, Victoria, La ré-zi-gne zign' boum boum! boum!"[84] This song, representing the most popular verse of the voyageurs, was also undoubtedly very popular amongst the rest of French Canadian society. Yet these variations explicitly reference paddling and possess a bilingualism that may have been used to synchronize a heterogeneous voyageur brigade. These features indicate likely composition in the fur trade era.

Many voyageurs employed by the North West Company eventually turned to lumbering and carried on the folksong tradition. Courtesy of Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 972.2.144.

In assessing the historical value of Lemieux's collection, it is important to consider the origins of the *Franco-Ontarien* population. A small number of French Canadian voyageurs settled around the Great Lakes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries (for instance at Sault Ste. Marie and Pénétanguishene), while the lumbering era produced small settlements along the Ottawa valley and eventually westwards towards Lake Huron.[85] Most *Franco-Ontarien* families arrived in Ontario towards the end of the nineteenth-century, often directly from rural parishes in the St. Lawrence valley. This does not indicate that Lemieux's informants were disconnected from the voyageur repertoire; indeed, it was rural parishes surrounding Montreal (such as Sorel) that supplied much of the labour for the fur trade and lumbering industries.[86] Many songs were undoubtedly passed down through *habitant* families in rural Quebec before arriving in Ontario. Nonetheless, it is clear that substantial fragments of the voyageur repertoire were preserved. Besides the numerous versions of "Trois Beaux Canards," there are segments of the Ermatinger collection that reappear in Lemieux's work. For instance the song "Le Petit Cotillon Blanc," is almost identical to that of the

[83] *Ibid*., vol 1, 82-83.

[84] *Ibid*., 84-85.

[85] Gaétan Gervais, "L'Ontario français (1821-1910)," *Les Franco-Ontariens,* ed. Cornelius J. Jaenen (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1993), 50-94; Nute, *The Voyageur,* 178-82.

[86] Gervais, 50-94; Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 180-184.

Ermatinger collection, both in its verse as well as its chorus.[87] Lemieux's informer Stanislas Gervais learned this song as a youth among the elders of Saint-Charles Ontario in the late nineteenth-century. That a transcription made on the Columbia River in the early nineteenth-century is closely replicated by a folklorist collecting in Ontario in the mid twentieth-century is indeed impressive. This example reinforces the accuracy and credibility of Lemieux's collection, demonstrating Walter Ong's assertion that music may "act as a constraint to fix a verbatim oral narrative."[88]

Another song of the Ermatinger collection, "Un Oranger Il y a," is closely reproduced in two different versions in *Chansonnier franco-ontarien*. As with "Trois Beaux Canards," the verse is almost identical in each case, while the chorus exhibits variation. One of Lemieux's versions, which he titles "La Fille Aux Oranges," possesses the English chorus "Hop! says I, says I, says he, hop! says I, says he! he!"[89] Lemieux notes the French pronunciation of this chorus, with "Says I" sounding like "Sé zaî," and "Says he" as "sé zi."[90] This interesting variation of a prominent voyageur song indicates a melding of English influence with the old French repertoire. This likely occurred in the later stages of the fur trade when English speakers became increasingly prevalent within the canoe brigades of the Great Lakes region. The ethnographer Johann Georg Kohl documented some of these changes, translating the following statement from a voyageur on Lake Superior in the 1850s: "If a party of Voyageurs meet, there are often so many Britons, and Scotch, and Irish, and Yankees among them, that when one begins singing there is often nobody who knows how to join in."[91] This context is precisely the sort that may have inspired the composition (or transposition) of an English chorus onto a French verse to facilitate the English speakers' participation. Singing played the vital operational role of setting the pace and synchronizing the strokes, not to mention facilitating social bonding over long voyages.[92] Lemieux's examples of a mixed repertoire are perhaps his most valuable and deserve further examination within the cultural, class, and musical contexts of the later fur trade era.

The songs that display Aboriginal influence are perhaps the most interesting of all. Lemieux presents a song entitled "Le Petit Sauvage" that possesses a French verse and a chorus that appears to be in an Aboriginal language or dialect.[93]

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[87] Lemieux, vol. 1, 62-63; Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830)," 158.

[88] Ong, *Orality and Literacy,* 62.

[89] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 1, 96-97.

[90] *Ibid*.

[91] Kohl, *Kitchi Gami,* 261.

[92] The functionality of voyageur singing in setting the pace of travel and synchronizing the strokes is frequently mentioned in the primary accounts of the fur trade. The element of social bonding, however, is rarely commented upon and has not been systematically studied.

[93] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 2, 40-41.

It is a variation of a song included in Ernest Gagnon's 1865 *Chansons Popularies du Canada* entitled "Tenaouiche Tenaga, Ouich' Ka!"[94] It seems certain that this song originated in the fur trade, and Gagnon speculates that the Aboriginal lyrics are "de l'*imitation* de sauvage."[95] Early observers noted Aboriginal influence on voyageur singing, in particular on the canoe choruses.[96] From at least the late eighteenth-century the voyageurs are documented issuing "war whoops" or "Indian shrieks" at the beginning and end of their songs.[97] Other accounts from this era indicate that cross-cultural musical interaction was a widespread phenomenon, with voyageurs for instance participating in Aboriginal hunting songs and "conjuring" ceremonies while wintering in the interior.[98] Carolyn Podruchny has argued that voyageurs imitated Aboriginal customs not only to familiarize themselves with life in the *pays d'en haut,* but also to assert their own distinct identity.[99] "Tenaouiche Tenaga, Ouich' Ka!" is fascinating for the historian not only for its mixture of languages, but because it describes an Aboriginal funeral in which four men cover a deceased body to ritualized female singing.[100] This version of Gagnon's deserves further linguistic and musicological study, as the lyrical descriptions seem to correlate with certain historic Wendat (Huron) and Anishinabe funerary customs, for instance the covering ceremonies observed during the Feast of the Dead.[101]

Lemieux's "Le Petit Sauvage" is more problematic to interpret, offering a modern and derogatory image of Aboriginals. The lyrics begin "C'était un p'tit sauvage, tout noir, tout barbouillé, Ouichté! s'en va t-à la rivière, c'ètait pour s'y laver, Ouichté! p'tit canot i' a r'viré, l' p'tit sauvag' s'est noyé."[102] When the priest arrives to perform a service at the funeral, instead of the usual procedure he deposits into the gravesite four bottles of Brandy. It should be noted that by the early nineteenth-century the voyageurs were a diverse

[94] Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires,* 124-26.

[95] *Ibid*., 124.

[96] J.H. Willis identifies Aboriginal influence on "the whoop and shout, or canoe chorus" of the voyageurs. John Howard Willis, *Scraps and sketches, or, the album of a literary lounger* (Montreal: H.H. Cunningham, 1831), 37.

[97] Elizabeth Simcoe, *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary,* ed. Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1965), 64; Sir Richard Henry Bonnycastle writes that "In the north-west, these songs either begin or end with the. . war-whoop." See Sir Richard Henry Bonnycastle, *The Canadas in 1841* (London: H. Colburn, 1841), 17.

[98] For instance, see George Nelson, *My First Years in the Fur Trade: The Journals of 1803-1804,* ed. by Laura Peers (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 145-46, 153.

[99] Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World,* 170-71.

[100] Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires,* 124-26.

[101] Bruce Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1987), 85-90; Harold Hickerson, "The Feast of the Dead among the Seventeenth Century Algonkians of the Upper Great Lakes," *American Anthropologist,* 62:1(Feb., 1960), 81-107.

[102] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 2, 40-41.

group of French Canadian, Métis, and Aboriginal men, and that they frequently sang about alcohol in their paddling songs.[103] Yet Lemieux traces this version to the early twentieth-century, when racist attitudes permeated Canadian society and may have become represented in French verse. The chorus, like Gagnon's, is in an Aboriginal language (or at least in imitation): "Ouich-té! Tou-man' la-gatte ouich-tat' Ti-o re-ma-oua, Ouich-ta! Tou-man' ra-oué, Ouich-té!"[104] It is difficult to reconcile a chorus that suggests Aboriginal linguistic influence with a verse that portrays Aboriginals in a derogatory manner. Yet these components did not necessarily originate at the same moment, and the chorus in this case may be much older than the verse. As we have seen, folksongs often integrate older and newer lyrical material, and it is the task of the historian to separate the layers for comparison and analysis.

It is difficult to determine the extent of Aboriginal influence in the other songs of Lemieux's collection. At first glance, there appears to be numerous Aboriginal choruses, with lyrics devoid of French and English words. Yet there is a long history in French folk singing of verbalizations or vocables: "nonsense syllables" fashioned for their sound and rhythm. These are what Laforte calls "les refrains onomatopéiques."[105] In describing a voyageur chorus, Gagnon quotes a seventeenth-century French grammarian who writes of the "infini d'interjections qui se trouvent dans les chansons popularies."[106] These interjections were often meaningless, such as "*lirompha, dada, etc.*"[107] It seems a difficult task to distinguish Aboriginal words from the dozens of "nonsense syllables" found throughout Lemieux's collection. For instance the song "J'ai 'Té dans ces Prisons" contains the following chorus: "Hhî r' lun ti d' li, r' lum ti d' lo!"[108] Without the assistance of someone well versed in the Algonquian or Iroquoian language families, it may be impossible to detect Aboriginal linguistic influence. And yet, this may prove a worthwhile endeavour. The North American fur trade involved extensive material and cultural exchanges between European and Aboriginal peoples, and the degree to which this manifested on a musical level has not been adequately studied.

Germain Lemieux's collection of *Franco-Ontarien* folksongs contributes much to the field of French Canadian folklore as well as to Canadian history. Lemieux reflects the work of his predecessors and

[103] Nicholas Garry records an instance near Red River in 1821 when his voyageurs not only sang about numerous varieties of alcohol, but finished their song by drinking water and imitating the desired effect. See Nicholas Garry, *The Diary of Nicholas Garry Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company: A detailed narrative of his travels in the Northwest Territories of British North America in 1821,* ed. W.J. Noxon (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973), 34.

[104] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 2, 40-41.

[105] Laforte, "Archives de Folklore," 45.

[106] Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires,* 62.

[107] *Ibid*.

[108] Lemieux, *Chansonnier,* vol. 2, 110-11.

presents regional variations that are rich in historical and cultural information. He follows in the footsteps of Ernest Gagnon, who emerged as the first true folklorist of Quebec and who was influenced by the first wave of European folklorists in the nineteenth-century. While Gagnon's work remains valuable mostly for its early sampling, it contains nationalist sentiments that generalize authorship and origin, and Gagnon does not provide details concerning his fieldwork techniques or the informants of each piece. Marius Barbeau renewed and revitalized the field of French Canadian folk studies, applying anthropological standards for fieldwork and providing information concerning transmission, location, local history, and origins of collected material. Barbeau was prolific and virtually free of simplistic nationalist explanations, publishing nearly one hundred titles in French and English, recording and transcribing thousands of folksongs for the National Museum and the Archives de Folklore, and attracting a number of new students to the discipline. Barbeau's disciples began collecting folksongs and some, such as Luc Lacourcière, helped establish the important folklore program at Laval University. It is in this institution that Germain Lemieux received the bulk of his training. His collection of *Franco-Ontarien* folksongs reflects the conscientious fieldwork techniques espoused by Barbeau.

Lemieux's reinsertion of explicit nationalist sentiments into his work reveals much concerning the French Canadian and specifically *Franco-Ontarien* condition in the mid-late twentieth-century. As French Canadians outside of Quebec felt increasingly vulnerable during the 1960s, some fought back with fiery nationalist rhetoric, attempting to rejuvenate nationalism and promote *survivance*. Yet despite his nationalist sentiments and motivations, Lemieux's work is of much value to historians. Many of the songs in his collection were created or adapted during the fur trade era when French Canadians lived and sang with British and Aboriginal peoples. These influences can be detected throughout the repertoire, although the Aboriginal material is the most difficult to detect and most problematic to interpret. There is much potential for further study. A comparison of Lemieux's versions with those collected in Quebec and France could elucidate the cultural influences and processes of change that occurred to the French folksong repertoire as it transformed in the New World. The voices of those who could not write down their perceptions and experiences are preserved in fragmentary form in folksong collections, waiting to be pieced ogether by historians of the twenty-first century.