

## **La Societe Canadienne Francaise du Minnesota (LSCF): A brief history**

**La Societe C-F** had an official life span of about 22 Years, from 1979-2001. Like many similar organizations, its beginning and its evolution shared many names and faces. At times these came together or grew apart, Hopes and dreams might have been unrealistic, but La Societe C-F made its mark.

Much of LSCF's history is traced through its newsletters, *Chez Nous*, and *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, which together and separately chronicled French-Canadian and French heritage from 1980 through 2001. The index of these newsletters are available on file at a number of Midwest historical societies and institutions. See listing in the Index.

The French & French-Canadian presence in the Twin Cities and Midwest has been so strong and ancient, there have naturally been numerous efforts over the last 150 years to organize, assemble, and celebrate.

Other organizations long preceded La Societe in the Twin Cities, western Wisconsin and Minnesota. One of the last to occur, and one of the most enduring, mostly due to the passion and charismatic charm of **John Rivard**, was LSCF.

LSCF may have had its informal birth with meetings called to discuss French-Canadian Genealogy..

**Al Dahlquist** remembered the initial events in a Feb. 23, 2012 e-mail as follows: "There was a genealogy group dating to 1969 or earlier in St Paul...Back somewhere in the 70's **Elmer Courteau** who was a night editor at the Mpls Star & Tribune would get some articles in that newspaper. He [and] our group called for anyone interested in French-Canadian ancestry to come to a meeting at St John's Church in Little Canada. There were about four of us there to talk to those who showed up. To our amazement we probably had over 500 people show up and all we could do was collect names and addresses and try to get them back for some later events. John Rivard did come at Elmer's invitation and also spoke. I did attend the gatherings at Mackinac [Aug 2-8, 1983] and also the one held at St Anthony Main [Nov. 16, 1985] which also attracted a lot of people. I also attended meetings for several years of La Societe before finally losing contact as they were moving around etc."

About 1975 or so, possibly related to plans for the 1976 Bicentennial, a group, **Joyeux Baladins**, formed to sing songs and participate in assorted events. In time, this group would become a more or less formal part of LSCF, though operating independently, later calling themselves **Les Canadiens Errants**. The group still performs on occasion.

On March 12, 1979, John Rivard convened the meeting which ultimately resulted in the formal formation of La Societe Canadienne Francaise du Minnesota. John, native of the Range-Somerset area in western Wisconsin, was a spark for the new organization, with great energy and charisma. **A brief history of John and La Societe, posted circa 2003, can be found on the internet at <http://chez-nous.net/aboutla.html>.**

According to John's niece, **Catherine Rivard**, who was active in LSCF in the earliest days, "I remember that John walked into my office one day at the MIA [MN Institute of Arts] and said "We're going to form a French group." That was in 1977 I believe or maybe just before. We had a meeting open to all and John left it open to attendants what kind of group it would be. There were people there who wanted it to focus only on language or France; they were outnumbered by French Canadians [FC]. John would have taken it forward whichever way the vote had gone. After the vote the folks who had no interest in FC left, and LSCF was born. I don't think there was a previous group in the area...John saw the value in gathering elder Francos together to remember the old times, even if those gatherings were focused on singing long-forgotten songs, and remembering things about family and church that made them happy. Those things were part of Franco life, here and in Quebec. It is what kept us together during the times of repression and hardship. It was precious to them because of that." (portions of e-mails from Catherine Feb. 18 and 21, 2012).

Presidents of LaSociete (as known from references in newsletter.) Normal terms were June-May.

Beginning:

|             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1979        | John Rivard    |
| Aou 1983    | Gaston Rheume  |
| Aou 1984-86 | Louis Ritchot  |
| Feb 1986    | Pierre Girard  |
| 1988-90     | Mark Labine    |
| 1990        | Bruce Bedore   |
| 1992        | Leroy Dubois   |
| 1993-95     | Leo Gouette    |
| 1995-96     | Louis Ritchot  |
| 1997-1998   | Leo Gouette    |
| 1998        | John Edel      |
| 2000        | Dick Bernard   |
| J 2001      | Simone Germain |

Beginning in 1980, the first issue of *Chez Nous* was published. These small "kitchen table" publications, usually prepared by a single volunteer editor, gathered and shared information and stories relating to matters French-Canadian, and were to go on till the end of 2001, usually 6-8 pages, almost always every other month. While never intended to do so, these little newsletters provide a worthwhile history of the French-Canadian community in this area. (See Index which follows at page four and following.)

Because of the establishment of LSCF branches in differing places, in 1985, the Twin Cities chapter initiated a newsletter of its own called *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles (NVJ)*. This publication and *Chez Nous* 'shared the stage' from 1985 through 1991. *Chez Nous* became the general interest publication; *NVJ* primarily dealt with Twin Cities chapter news.

In 1982, LSCF **Carmelle Pommepuy** and **Francine Courtemanche Roche** noted that **KFAI**, a 25-watt neighborhood radio station in Minneapolis, was looking for persons to broadcast programs of a special interest. **Moi et l'Autre (Me and the Other)** premiered in 1982, presenting music and conversation with a French-Canadian and French flavor.

In 1984, Carmelle and Francine were on to other things. The slot was taken over by **Georgette Pfannkuch**, in a program called "**Bonjour Minnesota**". Later Georgette was joined by **Caryl Minetti**. Georgette continued on the program till her death in 2008, and Caryl and Georgette's husband **Olaf** continue the program to this day. *Bonjour Minnesota* can be heard live on Tuesday evenings at <http://kfai.org/bonjourminnesota> or live at FM **90.3** in Minneapolis or **106.7** in St. Paul. Those with internet can listen to archived programs as they wish.

In about 1982, LSCF founder John Rivard set about establishing new branches of La Societe in other places. A chapter in **St. Cloud** came first; thence the MN Iron Range (**Hibbing area**), **Little Falls MN** and **Chippewa Falls WI**. Except for St. Cloud, which still has infrequent informal gatherings, all of the chapters, including the Twin Cities, have ceased.

In March, 1999, LSCF had a gala celebration of 20 years as an organization. By then, however, membership and activities were dwindling. A small group ultimately and figuratively "turned off the lights and closed the door" in early 2002, and until 2012 Franco-Fete planning, LSCF was simply a memory, boxes of documents and some archival materials here and there.

What does the future hold for remembering and celebrating the French-Canadian culture and heritage? This is up to you and others.

2012 is a different world than LSCF saw in 1999 or in 1979. For the most part, the old times have departed, and communication means and technology have changed dramatically.

For the interim, a page can be found at the website <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/> under the title "**Au-delà des murs (Beyond the Walls**" - Resources for French-Canadians of the Midwest". (To easily find this page simply enter the French words in the search box and click enter.) This website will provide links to various resources relating to the Franco American experience. You are invited to visit and contribute pertinent links.

**INDEX for  
Chez Nous  
And  
Nouvelles Villes Jumelles  
1979-2001**

**Important note to user of this volume**

These publications are of La Societe Canadienne Francaise du Minnesota, an organization primarily of Minnesota and Wisconsin residents of French-Canadian ancestry.

Most publications in this series were Chez Nous, though for several years Nouvelles Villes Jumelles was an adjunct publication specifically for the twin cities area of Minneapolis-St. Paul. During part of this time, La Societe had hopes of becoming a regional organization with local chapters. That dream did not survive.

All entries are alphabetical with one very important exception: LSCF organizations and their activities are grouped together at the end of the document, beginning following the final alphabetical entry.

Information on reprinting all or portions of any newsletters can be obtained from Dick Bernard, [dick\\_bernardATmsn.com](mailto:dick_bernardATmsn.com), or in writing to Dick Bernard at 6905 Romeo Road Woodbury MN 55125-2421.

Complete sets of the newsletters have been provided to the libraries of the Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin Historical Societies, and IF Midwest at the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. IF Midwest has permission to post the newsletters to the internet.

The nearly 150 issues of the newsletters comprise over 950 pages of text, which has been hand-numbered sequentially. Page numbers in this index are not on the originals, so issue date is included with this entry. (As is true with many such publications, no one ever envisioned that they would endure, and thus they did not possess standardized things like page numbering, design or etc. They were essentially "cut and paste" creations at someones home using information and technology available at the time. They were created with much affection by a succession of editors, all who were volunteer members of La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota. The editors were as follows (showing beginning date of position. Unless otherwise indicated the editor listed is for Chez Nous):

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Avril 1980        | Catherine Rivard  |
| Janvier 1981      | Richard Kees  |
| Septembre 1981    | Francine Roche  |
| Janvier 1983      | Lucille Ingram  |
| Fevrier 1984      | Ms Jerry Forchette  |
| Mai 1985          | Jon Tremblay  |
| Septembre 1985    | Ed. Dick Bernard, Co-Ed Jerry Forchette   |
| Mai 86-Jan 90     | Pierre Girard (86-89) and Charles Bouley (Nouvelles Villes Jumelles –twin cities edition)<br>Jim Chouanard was also edited NVJ for a period of time |
| Jun 90 - 1992     | Bill Horn edited NVJ. Ultimately the publication became part of Chez Nous   |
| Jan 94-last issue | Dick Bernard (Catherine Rivard co-editor Jan-Juin 2000)   |

This index identifies the articles by both page, and volume number, as follows:

For Chez Nous MA89 means the issue in which the article is contained was the March-April, 1989, issue.

For Nouvelles Villes Jumelles the designation is the same, though preceded by NVJ. Thus, NVJ-MA89.

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