

**INTRODUCTION to
CHEZ NOUS and NOUVELLES VILLES JUMELLES
Publications of La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota
1980-2002**

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June 19, 2016

This three-volume book is the compiled issues of the newsletters *Chez Nous* and *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, exactly as seen by members of *La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota (LSCF)* between 1980 and 2002. It reflects the French-Canadian heritage in the Upper Midwest as recorded by ordinary people about and for ordinary people primarily in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Midwest states and Manitoba.

Chez Nous and later, *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, carried news and cultural stories by and about LSCF, its members and their communities. LSCF was founded in St. Paul MN in March, 1979 (page 1). The history of LSCF is outlined at pages VII-X in this book.

In the 36 years since the first *Chez Nous* was published, Avril (April) 1980, the newsletters have become their own witness to history. It is for this reason that *French-American Heritage Foundation* has elected to publish them as a permanent public record.



Like letters from one family member to another, the approximately 1000 articles in this book are a “potluck” of the rich cultural heritage of the Midwest French-Canadians. Like a potluck, you’re never sure who brought what, or what delicacy is somewhere down the line for which you need to keep some space on the plate. Also, like a potluck, there’ll be more than enough for every palate, and leftovers to share.

The index of this three-volume book includes over 2000 entries, about many topics related to the Midwest French-Canadians, and French. There are 55 recettes (recipes sent in by readers); 40 articles related to North Dakota; 24 on Genealogy; 53 on French-Canadians and on and on.

The readers of the newsletters primarily spoke English only; thus the newsletter language used was English. At the same time, 54 articles in this book are in French or about the French language, many translated into English, and the entire publication is about French-Canadian or French topics.

These volumes represent what I have long called “kitchen table” publications. Such publications exist wherever groups of people come together for some common purpose. Somewhere along the line a suggestion is often made: “we should have a newsletter”.

If the organization is fortunate, someone volunteers, no particular skill expected or required, and a newsletter begins, and perhaps continues, in this particular case, for over twenty years.

Rarely are archival copies of such newsletters kept, and almost never does an editor think that his or her newsletter will live much beyond its publication date.

The reader of this book doubtless will identify with some similar publication he or she has seen or participated in over the years. Such a document is more than “Minutes”, though portions of Minutes are often a part. It may be the newsletter of a church or school group, or a social club. Whatever the case, there is “news” for the particular special interest for which it is published.

Newsletters are about relationships of people gathered in some community.



In 1980 *Chez Nous* (CN) came into existence. Several years into its existence, in 1986 (p. 180), a second and parallel publication, *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles* (NVJ), was born within the same organization, speaking to the same constituency. NVJ reflected a perceived unmet need at the time its creation, a common tension in groups. Even so, as reflected in this book, from the beginning the two newsletters borrowed from each other, so there is occasional redundancy.

Beginning in 1991 came a reengagement (p. 449), where the two newsletters shared the same shell, but kept their names and editors. Then came a “marriage” of the two newsletters, (p. 807). The publication was, once again, simply *Chez Nous*.

Of course, there are untold stories behind these changes. These were, after all, “newsletters”, put together by people. Sometimes feelings, hardly nuanced, were expressed publicly, in print! *La Société* was a family. Some of the story is revealed within the newsletters themselves.



The newsletters were published at a time right before intense change in communications technology and information delivery systems, but we didn’t know that at the time.

A piece of research published in August, 1991, by a national Public Relations firm indicates the hierarchy of preferred ways of communicating at that time in history.

1. One-to-one, face-to-face.
2. Small group discussion/meeting
3. Speaking before a large group
4. Phone conversation
5. Hand-written personal note
6. Typewritten, personal letter not generated by computer
7. Computer generated or word-processing-generated "personal" letter
8. Mass-produced, non-personal letter
9. Brochure or pamphlet sent out as a "direct mail" piece
10. Article in organizational newsletter, magazine, tabloid
11. News carried in popular press
12. Advertising in newspapers, radio, tv, mags, posters, etc.
13. Other less effective forms of communications (billboards, skywriters, etc.)

pr reporter, August 26, 1991, with permission

From the above list, *La Société* at the time would have emphasized #'s 1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10. Notice the reference to “computer” in #6 and #7. For almost all of us, then, “computer” was, at best, a novelty, rarely seen in our daily lives; probably introduced to us by a grandkid, or at some technology workshop at work.

La Société was a personal organization, primarily local, so a good percentage of those receiving the newsletter would also attend other events where other members were also in attendance.



The name of the original newsletter, “*Chez Nous*”, is defined in the very first issue, Avril 1980: “***Chez Nous. It means “our house” or “our place”, and it connotes warmth, congeniality, familiarity, and support.***” (page 3 in Vol. One).

Lore has it that the name was chosen largely because founder **John Rivard** had a well known contemporary and relative in Québec, **Adjutor Rivard**, who had published a well known book about French-Canadians entitled “*Chez Nous*”. So this modest publication was christened and remained *Chez Nous*.

(The book, *Chez Nous*, published in 1914, and a Wiki entry about Adjutor Rivard himself, are accessible on the internet.)

Over the years I began to keep a notebook ultimately including all 155 newsletters from our small, very low budget, but vibrant organization, LSCF. I was editor of near 100 of the mostly 6 to 8 page *Chez Nous*, from 1985 till we decided to close down at the beginning of 2002.

(The early collection of newsletters was incomplete. Over the years, occasional holes were filled thanks to someone who provided missing issues. Thus pages like 260C or similar will appear in this volume. These were missing links. It is believed that this book now includes every newsletter ever printed. The last issues, from 1986 & 1987, were found in June, 2016, and are pages 898-928 in this book.)

In about 2010 I developed an index of contents of the publications, which was updated in 2016. In 2014, many hours were spent converting the newsletters into the pdf files which comprise this book. In completing these processes, I re-visited every year of *La Société* as reflected in every one of its newsletter pages. The task was exhausting, but very interesting. Every page recorded part of a rich history.

At the time none of us felt our efforts were anything other than sharing current “news”. Now, looked at years later, the newsletters represent a significant contribution to the history of the French in America, particularly the French-Canadian heritage in the Midwest of the United States.

(These newsletters are also accessible on-line (<http://fahfminn.org/>, click Library, click *Chez Nous*. There, the newsletters are full size and easily printable.)



Preparing this book I learned, for the first time, that my own history with *La Société* could be traced within the pages of *Chez Nous*.

A neighborhood friend heard about and invited me to attend a concert “*An Evening in Old Montreal*” October 24, 1981, at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul. The event is generally described in *Le President Parle* (p. 41), and in greater detail at pages 44-43 (pages reversed in the book.)

The evening was phenomenal. I had never heard of the group sponsoring the event, *La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota*. On page 42 it is noted that I joined, most likely signing up the evening of the concert.

I was enrolled, in more than simply a signature on a membership form.

Quite certainly, the first newsletter I actually saw being produced was Juillet (July) 1982 (pages 61-64). The newsletter was being assembled by **Francine Roche** at her home in Coon Rapids MN. The process was pure "kitchen table", "cut and paste", a bit like making a batch of cookies from scratch.

Apparently, by the time of that visit, I had already been "reeled in" to the organization, as on page 62 it is noted that I had been elected to the Board of *La Société*. The adage, "strike while the iron's hot" comes to mind. Someone had spotted a "live one"!

As generations of leaders know, you are wise to not let such prospects get away!

Most certainly I was hooked.

In mid-June, 1982, my N. Dakota born and raised 100% French-Canadian Dad, Henry Bernard, and I attended a truly memorable LSCF picnic at St. Paul's Keller Island (p. 65) before embarking, with four companions, on our first visit to Québec. It is a time of very rich memories. I've often said that for my Dad the trip to Québec was much like dying and going to Heaven. He had come home, in almost a literal sense, to the land of his ancestors.

(Dad was 74 years old at the time of that trip. I was 42. I write this text at age 76. Time passes.... Dad contributed 13 articles to *Chez Nous* before he died in 1997.)



My personal involvement with small newsletters goes back to being student editor of my college newspaper in 1960-61, and subsequent amateur newsletters for assorted groups.

Newsletter production by volunteer amateurs for small constituencies was no mystery to me.

What struck me, reviewing this batch of newsletters, was our primitive technology. These were newsletters produced by volunteers. All the printer did was print the copy we had provided (we had to use a real human print shop with inked press: this was before sophisticated copy machines).

For most of the history, the layout was by old traditional "cut and paste" with typewritten text, prepared on someone's typewriter, perhaps adorned with some rudimentary art and press on lettering for headlines. It wasn't fancy, and it was time-consuming.

We were very limited in what we could do. In March 1982 the editor used photographs, but it is nearly impossible to make out what they showed. (p. 52). Screen prints (I called them 'half-tones') were possible of course. But for most of us, we didn't even know what that process even was nor how or where to access it. If we did, it was an extra expense out of our own pocket.



I recall a typical process from about 1990 when I edited the newsletter from my then-home in Hibbing MN about 200 miles north of St. Paul-Minneapolis. Each two months there was a newsletter. Perhaps a week before “deadline” I would assemble my file of potential news, and do the requisite typing and layout.

The newsletter included what was available: items sent to me by someone, often simply a clipping from a newspaper or magazine, etc. Of course, there were hand-written letters that had to be deciphered and typed. Always, there was more than enough news. Personal letters were the first priority.

Copyright? Regarding obvious copyrighted materials, I did my best to ascertain and attribute the source, as well as seek permission to reprint. This was a very imperfect process. An interesting article might come by mail from someone, with no date of publication or attribution. If interesting, it would be printed.

Ordinarily, I would mail the newsletter sheets to a print shop in the Twin Cities at Blaine MN, on Highway 65 just south of highway 242. The name of the place escapes me now. It was your basic husband and wife operation, doing small print jobs like invitations and similar. I recall that the wife was of French-Canadian descent, so she had an opportunity to get a first read of the newsletter, and she enjoyed and learned from it!

Post-printing, other volunteers continued the process.

Someone would pick up the printed newsletter, and deliver the box to LSCF member Leroy Dubois in Vadnais Heights. Leroy would complete the process, folding, affixing mailing labels and delivering to the nearest bulk rate postal facility. Later, the newsletter would arrive in my own, and other, mailboxes.

For a long while we had a sufficiently large circulation (over 200) to send bulk rate, which saved on postage, but slowed receipt of the newsletters - just like today. But money was money then. Printing and mailing were paid by LSCF. The extra volunteer labor was considered a donation.

Pierre Girard, at one time both President and editor of *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, recalled the post-production process and other duties of volunteers: *“I was the editor for NVJ for at least one year during my presidency and I would have the newsletter printed, I would then label them and bring them to the Golden Valley [MN] Post Office. At that time there were only a few Post Offices that would accept bulk mail and Golden Valley was one of them. I also checked our Post Office Box daily for at least two years until that job was taken over by Marie Trepanier. I would forward the money to John England and the membership info to Geo Labrosse.”*

Over and over, 155 times in all, this happened.

I know the newsletters were read, and often shared and saved.

The core audience throughout was elder-age (likely average age well over 60). There are over 35 obituaries indexed in this book, a large number given our small membership.

Our readers were for the most part from what I’d call the WWII generation. Few remain “in the here”, as Dad would say.



In May, 1985, our first newsletter utilizing one of early versions of word processors was produced. It was probably an early Apple (p. 154). As can be noted in the newsletters, typewriters at the time were often superior to the Apple, at least in terms of visual quality. Computers were a technology in development for a specific purpose: computing. For typesetting, they were primitive.

Then, I suppose, the word processor was state of the art for common persons, which we all were. My first, very apprehensive, personal introduction to computers came in 1982. Years later, my job required this kind of skill set, though the transition was slow and difficult.

It wasn't until well into the 1990s that computers became common, and things like columns, and borders, and shading and the different sizes of type were first easily accessible and commonly used. The quality rapidly improved.

Of course, in the days of *Chez Nous* and *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, perhaps near 100% of our readers did not know e-mail, even at the end, and relied totally on pieces of paper transmitted by U.S. mail to individual mailboxes.

It wasn't until Jan-Feb 1999 that an e-mail address appeared in the newsletter (p. 760).

In Jan-Feb 2000 a website was referred to for the first time (p. 828).

Oh, what a change. Back then, I venture, none of us could have visualized today's mysterious array of communication media. And this was not that long ago.

We tend to forget how recently e-mail came to us common folks.

Today, technology outraces even the computer savvy. Facebook was founded in 2004. The first YouTube video went on-line in 2005. Twitter? 2006. The iPhone? 2007. Ten years in technology today is like 100 or more years in the older days. It can get confusing.

We've all experienced this.



I wonder what's ahead in the next generation. We always think that things will be even better. There is a downside as well. Someday, we might consider the good old 'cut and paste' days to be something we wish we had again.

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POSTNOTE: Our newsletter died at the end of 2001, when we were doing our best work, utilizing better technology. The second to last issue mentioned 9-11-01, then three months in the past (page 886). Members were dying and in other ways just leaving. People we had relied on as readers were not computer literate and had no intention of becoming so. In a way, we represented the dilemma of contemporary society. Even today, we have not yet figured out how to bridge the gap between the old and the new, and it is hurting us.

But 1980-2002 – the time reflected in this volume – was indeed a memorable and now, historical, time.

La Société Canadienne Française du Minnesota (LSCF):

A Brief History

By Pierre Girard

Past President, La Société Canadienne Française
Member, Joyeux Baladins and Les Canadiens Errants

Presidents of La Societe C-F du Minnesota

Beginning

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

La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota (LSCF) had an official life span of about 22 years, from 1979-2002. Like many similar organizations, LSCF was preceded by other groups, and its evolution had different phases and factions sometimes coming together or growing apart with pretensions of potential growth that might have been unrealistic, but were deeply felt.

LSCF was an organization of people.

Like virtually all volunteer led organizations, LSCF had its seasons: it was born, it lived, and it died, it's existence now a dimming memory. But the "DNA" remains, with persons remaining to breathe life into a proud history, now through French-American Heritage Foundation (<http://fahfminn.org/>).

Much of LSCF's history can be traced through its newsletters, *Chez Nous*, and *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*, which together and separately chronicled stories about Midwest French-Canadian and French heritage from 1980 through the first month of 2002. The index for these newsletters, and every page of them, is in this book (see also pp I-VI). The newsletters are also preserved at a number of regional historical societies and institutions such as the Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota Historical Societies, and at the University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library.

Other organizations long preceded *La Société* in the Twin Cities, western Wisconsin and Minnesota. Some are outlined in a November 1989 article from *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles* (p. 194 in this book).

Since the earliest presence of the French in North America (1534) there has been an interest in matters French-Canadian, whose descendants were 8 % of Minnesota's population in 1980 (United States Census data). But the focus of traditional history was on French explorers and voyageurs, while most often the essence of this rich heritage was very quiet and hidden: farmers, merchants, workers and such.

Still, this region is full of French words describing streets, towns, lakes etc. (p. 72).

William Rogers of the University of Minnesota described well the hidden evidence and interest in Minnesota French-Canadian presence in a 1975 Adult Education Journal (p. 22F).



As best as can be determined, what became LSCF may have had its informal birth with a meeting called to discuss French-Canadian Genealogy about 1969.

Al Dahlquist remembered some early events in a Feb. 23, 2012 e-mail: *“There was a genealogy group dating to 1969 or earlier in St. Paul. (<http://mncig.org/index.html>) We went through rough times nearly always with very few people willing to act in leadership positions...Back somewhere in the 70s **Elmer Courteau** who was a night editor at the Minneapolis Star & Tribune would get some articles in that newspaper. He also, with our group, called for anyone interested in French-Canadian ancestry to come to a meeting at St. Johns Church in Little Canada. There were about four of us there to try 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 [invite] them back to some later events. **John Rivard** did come at Elmer's invitation and also spoke...I did attend the gatherings at Mackinac [Chez Nous pp 81 and 101] and also the one held at St. Anthony Main [Nov 1985, p. 187] which also attracted a lot of people... I also attended meetings for several years of La Société before finally losing contact as they were moving around etc.”*

About 1975 or so, possibly around plans for the 1976 Bicentennial, a singing group calling themselves **Les 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**.

For all of LSCF's history the singers and songs were an important part, at meetings and events. I first remember being part of *Joyeux Baladins*, and still have the jacket worn by the group. The groups had varying membership and leadership over the years. In 1983, the group changed its name. The Mars 1983 issue of *Chez Nous* refers to **Joyeux Baladins** (p. 84); in the Mai 1983 issue (p. 87), President John Rivard first mentions “our new group of singers, **Les Canadiens Errant**”.

There are several photos of the singing group in these volumes (pp 339E, 377, 492, 788, 862), and an article about the groups successful trip to Milwaukee in July, 1986 (p. 901). **Marie Trepanier**, long an active member of the group recalled that she really enjoyed the French songs the group sang, but initially didn't know what the words meant. *“I liked the songs, and singing, and I could pronounce the words correctly in French, but I just didn't know the French language.”* Marie was like most of the members of LSCF: their native language was English, but they loved the sound of the French language of their ancestry. For those whose heritage included use of the French language when growing up, singing and the songs brought back memories of home and community.



On March 12, 1979, LSCF founder **John Rivard** convened the meeting (p. 1) that ultimately resulted in the formal formation of *La Société Canadienne Française du Minnesota*. John, native of the Range-Somerset area in western Wisconsin, was a spark for the new organization. Mr. Rivard, the “Official Voyageur of Minnesota”, had great energy and charisma. He had a long career as a Catholic Priest (primarily Somerset WI), and in the years prior to *La Société* had been Manager of the Minnesota Historical Sites for Charles Lindbergh (Little Falls), and Northwest Fur Company Post (Pine City).

According to John's cousin, Catherine Rivard, who was active in LSCF in the earliest days: "I remember that John walked into my office one day at the MIA [Minneapolis Institute of Arts] and said "We're going to form a French group." I believe that was in 1977 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: [but] they were outnumbered by French Canadians. John would have taken it forward whichever way the vote had gone. After the vote the folks who had no interest in French-Canadian 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 Francos life, here and in Quebec. It is what kept [French-Canadians] together during the times of repression and hardship. It was precious to them because of that." parts of e-mails from Catherine, Feb. 18 and 21, 2012).

In the Jan. 1981 *Chez Nous* (p. 22A) John Rivard described the first crucial year of LSCF. While brief, his timeline describes well the kinds of things that help an organization thrive in its infancy.

As anyone who's ever been in a brand new "start up" organization knows, it is difficult to survive the first year. If you can survive year one, you have a chance to continue. LSCF survived and thrived.

A brief history of John, who died in 2005, and *La Société*, written circa 2003, can be found on the internet at <http://chez-nous.net/aboutla.html>. Personal recollections about Mr. Rivard by Dick Bernard are at p. 887 in this book. A 22-minute memorial video about John Rivard's life can be found at <http://francoamericanarchives.org/archives/video/john-t-rivard/>.

In Avril 1980, the first issue of *Chez Nous* was published. This small "kitchen table" publication and its successors gathered and shared information and stories related to matters Midwest French-Canadian, and continued till January, 2002, usually 6-8 pages, almost always 6 times per year. While never intended to do so, these little newsletters, ultimately nearly 1000 pages of volunteer effort, provide a worthwhile history of the French-Canadian community in this area.

In about 1982, founder John Rivard set about establishing new branches of *La Société* in other places. A chapter in St. Cloud came first; thence the Iron Range (at Hibbing), 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.

Because of the establishment of branches in differing places, in 1986 the Twin Cities chapter initiated a newsletter of its own called *Nouvelles Villes Jumelles*. This publication and *Chez Nous* 'shared the stage' from 1986 through 1991, as they do in this volume. *Chez Nous* became the general interest publication; NVJ's primary focus was Twin Cities chapter news.

From the beginning, LSCF moved to become part of the greater community, whether the local French-Canadians or the community at large. It actively collaborated with many groups, such as the **International Institute of Minnesota** (www.iimn.org) and its **Festival of Nations** (www.festivalofnations.com) and **Alliance Française** (afmsp.org), among others. In Nov. 1985 (p. 170), the Red Lake Falls MN organization, **AFRAN (L'Association des Français du Nord)** and LSCF agreed to collaborate. These collaborations are evidenced throughout the newsletters. Often the key collaboration was support, such as publicizing the others activities, and direct participation in their events.

In 1982, LSCF leaders **Carmelle Pommepuy** and **Francine Courtemanche Roche** noted that **KFAI**, a 25-watt neighborhood radio station in Minneapolis, was looking for persons to broadcast programs for diverse constituencies. **Moi et l'Autre (Me and the Other)** premiered in 1982, presenting music and conversation with a French-Canadian and French flavor (p. 71).

Dick Bernard recalled a visit to a program in late October, 1982, right after another very successful concert, "Salut à Québec", Oct 23 (page 67): *"The program was in the morning, and hosted by Carmelle, with Francine coming a bit later with two of the musicians from the recent concert, Québécois **Martin Lavoie** and **Jean Guy Cote**. We five were crammed into a tiny studio in the steeple of the old Walker Methodist Church. There were two turntables, and two microphones. The musicians, including Francine, gave a live on-air performance, and it was superb. The Studio was used for all programs and was, charitably, messy. The transition from one program to the next was simple: the announcer going off-air would put a record on the turntable, and the music provided the transition time for the next announcer and program. At the time, I felt that the studio was a fire trap. (May 27, 2012 the Church was struck by lightning and did burn to the ground and has since been rebuilt. By then, KFAI had moved to much better studio facilities.) The internet era solved the problem of a tiny broadcast area, and now all programs are accessible world-wide on the web."*

In 1984, **Lucille Ingram** replaced Francine as DJ. In the same year Carmelle relocated to Montreal. In time, the program slot was taken over by **Georgette Pfannkuch**, later joined by **Caryl Minetti**, in a program called "**Bonjour Minnesota**". Georgette continued to host the program till her death in 2008. Caryl Minetti, **Dana Bogema**, and **Georgette's husband Olaf** continue the program to this day. It can be heard live on Tuesday evenings 8 – 10 p.m. at <http://kfai.org/bonjourminnesota>, or live at FM 90.3 in Minneapolis or 106.7 in St. Paul. Those with internet can also listen to archived programs as they wish.

Back at *La Société*, everything had its season. In January, 2002, the few remaining members of *La Société* published the final *Chez Nous*, and quietly and figuratively, we turned off the lights of a once vibrant organization.

Editors of Chez Nous & Nouvelles Villes Jumelles (NVJ)

Beginning

Avr 1980	Catherine Rivard
Jan 1981	Richard Kees
Sep 1981	Francine Roche
Jan 1983	Lucille Ingram
Fev 1984	Ms Jerry Forchette
Mai 1985	Jon Tremblay
Sep 1985	Dick Bernard & Jerry Forchette (co-CN)
Mai 1986	Charles Bouley (NVJ)
1987	Pierre Girard (NVJ)
Nov 1989	Jim Chouanard (NVJ)
Jui 1990	Bill Horn (NVJ)
Avr 1992	NVJ becomes part of Chez Nous
Jan 2000	Catherine Rivard co-edits two issues with Dick Bernard
Jan 2002	Final Issue of Chez Nous, Dick Bernard, editor