

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (III)
Pennsylvania Skiing, Looking back to the Past: French-Canadian Immigration
in Manchester, New Hampshire**

Traveling America (III) Report One: Pennsylvania Skiing

July 26, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I've not filed a report lately. After my reports on the Mediterranean cruise and writing about our European ancestors' concepts of fair play, I needed a break. So Reporterette, dog Milli, and I took a mini-vacation with a four-day drive into the Northeastern United States with overnight stops in Pennsylvania and New Hampshire. Our route is shown in Figure 1.

The purpose of this trip was for Holly to research her family tree. She thought several of her French-Canadian ancestors may have settled in the area around Manchester, New Hampshire, in the late 1890s. Her maternal grandparents were born in the Quebec province of Canada and later moved to New Hampshire to work in the textile mills.

As seen in this map, our route diverted west before it headed east. On our way to New Hampshire, we decided to swing-by a ski mountain in Pennsylvania.

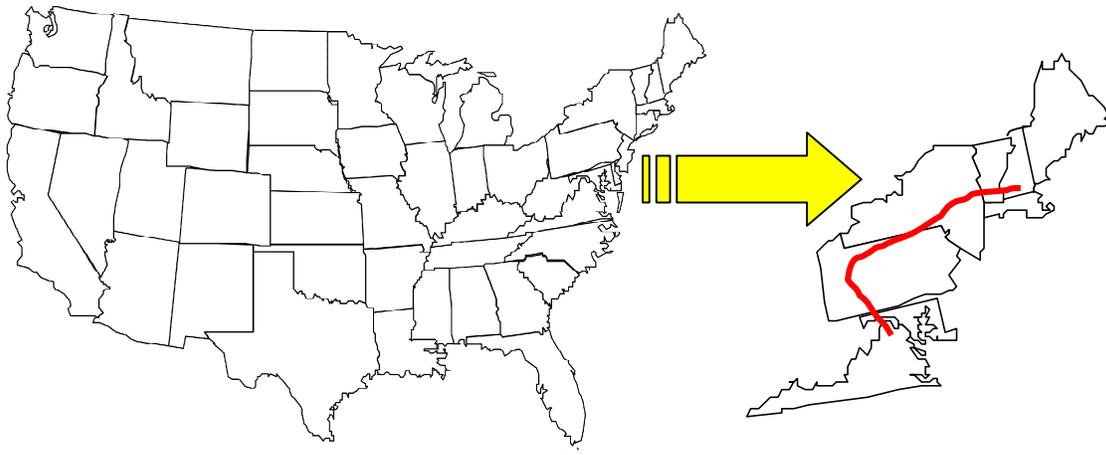


Figure 1. Visiting Blue Knob, Pennsylvania, and Manchester, New Hampshire.

Blue Knob: Blue Knobs, and Blue Balls

Our first stop was in Pennsylvania at Blue Knob State Park, a place where I purchased a ski lot in the 1970s. I had not visited Blue Knob for over twenty years. I thought it would be a good idea to see if the place was still intact and if any squatters had laid claim to my 1/4 acre plot.

Blue Knob was the first ski slope where I put on skis and attempted to navigate a bunny slope (the beginner's hill). Blue Knob is where I learned to tumble down a slope with skis the size of redwoods. Since then, I've continued to battle skis, poles, ski lifts, torture-chamber boots, and my ineptitude.

At Blue Knob, skiers had to deal with another foe: ice. Blue Knob was a legendary cold mountain. Women called the place, "Blue Knobs." Men named it, "Blue Balls." I'm not certain why I tried to learn to ski in a place that froze human peripherals. In hindsight, I suspect it was because of the *après ski* activities. They took place in a large corrugated building, housing a saloon, and featuring a disk jockey who played 1970's rock and roll music.

Around 4 PM, after a day of skating on ice, we would usually head for this dance hall. Once inside, and after warming our innards with hot buttered rum, we began a marathon of dancing and drinking---one lasting several hours---while still in our ski boots. Credence and the Doors rang forth. So did booze and laughter. Finally, around 12 PM, we gathered up what little remained of our thoughts and senses, and walked down part of the mountain to a house we rented for the season. There, in less than a midnight second, all was quiet.

We also cooked, drank, and danced some of the nights away at our ski “lodge.” We sometimes smoked the night away as well. Being of practical nature, we inhaled. Why bother stoking if you don’t stoke? Clinton is a strange man. *I smoked but I didn’t inhale.* But then, his definition of “having sex” astounds most of the world’s population.

Here Joe, Take my Equipment!

After I had conquered the beginner’s slope, I headed for Mambo Alley, the best intermediate slope at Blue Knob. I was using a collection of assorted equipment. Because of the previous night’s revelries, I had misplaced one of my ski poles and had picked up another pole from an understanding ski lodge friend. The two poles were of different lengths, but it made no difference to me because I didn’t know how to use them in the first place.

During this first winter on the ski slopes, I was never in full control of my so-called skiing. The long skis made it almost impossible for a novice to navigate a hill, especially on ice, especially if he did not know how to use the poles for turning and stopping. During my first run on Mambo, I collided twice...with the same man.

Heading down Mambo---unsafe at any speed---I ran smack into a skier who had stopped on the side of the trail to talk with his buddy. I knocked him down and fell-off to his side. I apologized to the man, whom his friend called Joe. He was gracious about my mishap and said he was OK. We collected ourselves. Joe and his friend took-off down the hill, while my ski partner explained the preferred protocol for skiing: Ski over the slope, not over the people on the slope.

Off we went. In less than 200 yards, I was out of control again. Sweet Jesus! There was Joe and his buddy, who had stopped once again off the side of the slope.

My skis were iron, and Joe was the magnet. Wham!

Joe went down. I landed on top of him. He pushed me away and then realized I was the same guy who assaulted him a few moments earlier. He offered a few choice comments (paraphrased, but reflecting the spirit of that moment):

- Joe, “Damn it! What the hell are you doing skiing on this slope? Don’t go anywhere ‘till I can get down the mountain. Let’s go...Christ! My ski pole is bent!”
- Me, “I’m sorry. Look, take one of my ski poles. It’s yours. That’s the least I can do.”
- Joe, “It’s probably the wrong length.”
- Me, “No problem. I have a short pole and a long pole. One of them should work just fine.”
- Joe, “Good God! Let’s get away from this lunatic.”

During this trip, we stopped for a while at Blue Knob. We had lunch at a café at the top of the mountain. I told Holly and Milli about Joe and the ski pole. Holly laughed. Milli stared at my hamburger. I walked around the mountain and reminisced about the many fine times at the dance

hall and the ski cabin. I did not dwell much on my experiences with skiing; most of them weren't fine enough for recollection. I did dwell a lot about the after-ski evenings.

Anyway, aside from the ski pole incident, my skiing exploits become grander as they take place farther into the past. It was time to go. The purpose of the trip was to find records of Holly's French-Canadian ancestors.

Traveling America (III) Report Two: Looking Back to the Past¹

July 27-28, 2006

We made our way to New Hampshire, where Holly started her family tree research at a library, shown in Figure 2.

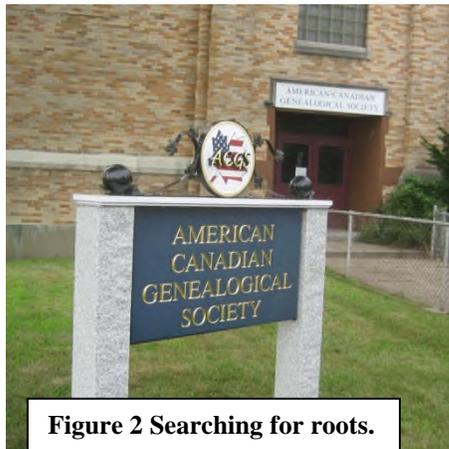


Figure 2 Searching for roots.

Milli and I had a lot of time on our hands and paws, so we entertained each other. I would offer her water; she would drink it. I would offer her food; she would eat it. I would take her for a walk; she would offer back altered versions of the water and food I had offered her. In between her naps, we would repeat the cycle.

Who said a dog's life is a dog's life?

In between these love fests, I roamed around Manchester, I checked out its history and talked with some of the locals. What struck me were the perceptions the early Americans had about the influx of French-Canadians around the 1900s. Many of them were negative. How could that be? French-Canadians have been stereotyped by

Americans as OK, a bit aloof and stiff, but still OK.

We understand them. They're mostly white. They're mostly Catholics. They're mostly democratic. However, they do not like speaking English and they dress funny, such as not wearing baseball caps to dinner and to bed.

Fellow human, if you live in America, but talk funny and look funny, you are not American. Even though you've come across the border legally, can recite the Constitution, and have taken up patriotic practices such as rooting for the New England Patriots, you're still suspect.

Before continuing with this subject, some history about Manchester will be helpful:²

In 1807, Samuel Blodget opened a canal and lock system to allow vessels passage around the falls (of Manchester). He envisioned here a great industrial center, "the Manchester of America," like the Industrial Revolution's Manchester in England, the first industrialized city in the world. Sure enough, in 1809, Benjamin Prichard and others built a cotton-spinning mill operated by waterpower on the western bank of the Merrimack.

Incorporated as a city in 1846, Manchester would become home to the largest cotton mill in the world. Other products made in the community included shoes, cigars, and paper. The Amoskeag foundry made rifles, sewing machines, textile machinery, fire engines, and locomotives. The rapid growth of the mills

¹ Notes 3 and 4 were sourced from a short paper I came across while doing research for this report. It is hard copy and written by Charles Emond. It appears to be a proposal for a thesis or a book.

² "Manchester, New Hampshire." Wikipedia.

demanded a large influx of workers, resulting in a flood of immigrants, particularly French Canadians.

Here are two comments about the French-Canadians who traveled to New Hampshire during the turn of the century (1899 to 1900). Keep in mind that 1/3 of the population of Quebec left this province to work in the mills of New England:

French-Canadians were called, “the Chinese of the Eastern States.”³
French-Canadians were called, “North American peasants.”⁴

Sound familiar? Let’s substitute some words:

Mexicans are called, “the Chinese of the Southwestern States.”
Mexicans are called, “North American peasants.”

In the Boston area, it was the Irish; in Minnesota, the Swedes; in Santa Fe, the Jews. It was always someone else who talked and dressed funny, but never the natives.

Why are we leery of people of a different ilk? It comes from our DNA. In earlier times, the different-looking cavemen and tribesmen coming over from yonder vale to visit a local populace were not rolling-in for a social call. They were after booty and bodies. We keep our guard up. It’s part of our genes.

Today, the largest ancestry group within the Manchester’s population is French, making up about 35% of the citizenry. Have they assimilated? Yes. Do they pose a threat to the minorities of Irish, German, and English ancestries? No. They cheer for America. They cheer for the New England Patriots. They are as American as apple pie.

Then why should the current “Latino” influx be of concern? For these reasons: First, many are coming illegally without control on quotas. They are not concerned for their long-term welfare, their impacts on their soon-to-be neighbors, or the diseases/crime they may transport. Second, they are coming ahead of those who wait in line for legal entry. Third, they are coming in such numbers that they are not readily assimilating into America’s melting pot. Fourth, they are placing enormous pressure on the infrastructure where they have settled.

I have written about these problems in earlier essays. I have no problem with legal immigration. But our political leaders have failed us. They have failed to perform their most important job: protecting the integrity of America’s borders.

I have also written that a balkanized country rarely succeeds. (For proof, see the history of humans.) The beauty of America is that its semi-balkanized tribes have subsumed themselves into a melting pot, yet have kept their identity, if only for the sake of ritual and pride.

What is the answer? Controlled immigration. Let’um in, but with a visa. Assimilation is *the* key, including a healthy dose of PR about America. Besides, if they no longer talk funny or look funny, they won’t be noticed.

Before long, a Latino or another black will be on the Supreme Court---most likely a woman. In the not too distant future, a black or an American Indian will be the Vice-President or President of our country, quite possibly a woman. It will not have come about because of a balkanized America.

³ Michael Guignard, *La Foi*, La Culture, La Langue, 1982, 90.

⁴ Horace Miner, *St. Denis* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1939), xiv.

Reverse Immigration

As Milli and I drove around Manchester, my dog observed that there was a paucity of PETCO stores, not to mention canine grooming salons. I agreed with Milli. It appeared to us that Manchester has fallen on hard times. The city has a lot of closed-up stores and factories. The textile mills have moved to other countries. Figure 3 shows typical scenes of the city.



Figure 3. Where have all the factories (and people) gone?

As we were on our way to pick-up Reporterette, Milli and I entered into this dialogue:

- Reporter, "I've an idea. America's rust belt and blue-collar unemployment problems can be solved by shipping our out-of-work folks to where the work is. Yeah, Milli, they move away from America!"
- Milli....
- Reporter, "Places such as Canton, China, for textile workers; Acapulco, Mexico, for yard workers; and Raipur, India, for auto workers. Just think, Milli, they could send home their pay checks and help balance our budget!"
- Milli....
- Reporter, "OK, there might be some resentment at first. The Americans in those other countries would talk funny and look funny, but eventually, they would assimilate. Before you know it, Joe and Josephine of Columbus, Ohio, would be able to speak Mandarin Chinese and use chop sticks on their chow mien."
- Milli....
- Reporter, "OK, granted, the pay over there is not so good. But neither is the standard of living. Why would Joe and Josephine need money if there is nothing to spend it on?"
- Milli....

- Reporter, “Because they don’t have any jobs or money here in America. ...OK, I know there are a few holes in the idea. But what’s good for the immigrant goose is good for the emigrant gander.”
- Milli....

The great thing about having a conversation with your dog is the fact that your dog, by virtue of being your dog, thinks you are as great as you think you are.

And with that thought forgotten, we picked up Holly---who failed to find any branches to her family tree---and headed back to Virginia.