

THE FRENCH IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.*

It is not unnatural that in the history of British Columbia great attention has been given to the gold-rush era. The discovery of gold brought to an abrupt end the era of the fur trade and ushered in, with almost unseemly haste, the era of extensive exploitation of natural resources that has, in effect, prevailed to this day. Successive discoveries of gold and their accompanying minor "rushes" — to Wild Horse Creek, to Big Bend, to the Stikine, to the Peace, and to Cassiar—gave to men a knowledge of the geography and wealth of British Columbia almost undreamed of. Naturally, too, the emphasis has been on achievement—where did they go? how much did they find? what did they do? Frequently the more lasting social implications of this sudden metamorphosis have been lost sight of in the rapidly changing scene, for the cycle of "boom and bust" in the gold-rush economy has usually been relatively short in British Columbia.

It is hoped that this article will give some indication of the part played by one segment of that complex mass of gold-crazed humanity that funnelled through Victoria and the Fraser River to the goldfields of the Cariboo. At best it can only be considered a preliminary study, for much more detailed examination of material remains yet to be done. However, some generalizations can now fairly safely be made concerning the role of the French in British Columbia.

To pass over the contribution to the development of this Province of the many French-Canadians who served in the fur-trading companies is unfortunately necessary. Men like Jules Maurice Quesnel, a fellow traveller with Simon Fraser on his epic voyage in 1808 who died a member of the Legislative Council of Canada, or like Leon Labine and Jean Ba'tiste Fortier, whose handiwork survives to this day in the bastion of old Nanaimo, made a worth-while contribution to our Province, but their story lies beyond the scope of this survey, which is strictly limited to

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those whom Mons. de Saint-Amant in his *Voyages en Californie et dans l'Orégon* called "Les Français de France . . . pour les distinguer des Français d'origine canadienne."¹

The question might well be asked why an envoy of the French Government was visiting California and Oregon in 1851 and 1852, for such was the function of Mons. de Saint-Amant. The answer is to be found in the large-scale migration of Frenchmen to California following word of the discovery of gold there in 1848. The first group of some forty men arrived in San Francisco on board *La Meuse* on September 14, 1849²—the precursors of an immigration which it is claimed, between November 30, 1849, and April, 1851, brought over 4,000 Frenchmen to California.³ Smaller numbers of French had come in from Mexico, Chili, the Sandwich Islands, and Louisiana, but the vast majority had come direct from Europe, largely through the ægis of dozens of "societies of emigration."

France at that time was in a turmoil. The Revolution of 1848 had seen the downfall of Louis Phillipe and, in the interlude before the election of Louis Napoleon as President, economic distress was widespread. Thousands were unemployed; the "national workshops" failed to provide the remedy, and emigration came to be regarded as a solution. The story of the duplicity and graft of many of these emigration societies is not a pleasant one,⁴ but they were responsible, in a large measure, for the existence of so large a French colony in California.

Since it was from this source that British Columbia received, in turn, its French population, it is interesting to examine what manner of person had found his way to California. Daniel Lévy, in his history *Les Français en Californie*, is perhaps a prejudiced commentator. He contended that the French formed not only the largest but the most important element of California's foreign population and that this arose mainly because an urban population had been transferred. The Mexicans and Chileans were mainly labourers, without either capital or education; the

(1) Mons. de Saint-Amant, *Voyages en Californie et dans l'Orégon*, Paris, 1854, p. 157.

(2) Daniel Lévy, *Les Français en Californie*, San Francisco, 1884, p. 67.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 75.

(4) Gilbert Chenard, *When the French Came to California*, San Francisco, 1944, *passim*.

Irish and Germans were either labourers or from rural areas; whereas the French, coming mainly from the towns, were better educated, had more capital, and were a more representative cross-section of their native land.⁵ One thing is certain: they did represent all shades of political opinion.

Perhaps a more reliable opinion is that offered by the San Francisco *Alta California* in 1853, which is interesting, too, for its attitude towards the French colony:—

There are about six thousand Frenchmen in this city. They are engaged in all occupations; they are bankers, physicians, speculators in land, importers, wholesale jobbers, retail merchants, mechanics and day laborers. A fair proportion of them are wealthy, and nearly all are industrious and good citizens. They come from all parts of France. . . . They all have the characteristics of Frenchmen, they must live in company, and talk so long as they remain awake, and gesticulate while they talk. There are but very few of them from France who intend to make California their home; they long for the time when they may have enough of the shining gold to return to *La Belle France*, and live there in ease and independence. They learn the English language very slowly, probably because they do not intend to make their permanent home here. They cannot avoid comparing California as it is, the growth of half a decade of years, with their own country, the growth of a thousand years, and as they see it, the comparison is very much in favor of the latter. Their universal intention of returning to France is an error, for which many of them will repent in time.

They complain that they have suffered injustice at the hands of the Americans. No doubt many of them have, like many of the Americans themselves. But one reason that the French have suffered injustice is that they have no political power. They have not endeavoured to become citizens,

(5) “ Nous avons déjà dit que, dans le principe, les Français formaient la population étrangère la plus remarquable et la plus importante, au point de vue du nombre et au point de vue des éléments qui la composaient.

“ Expliquons-nous.

“ Les émigrants de race espagnole, Mexicain, Chiliens, etc., étaient presque tous des travailleurs, sans capitaux et sans éducation. Les Irlandais et les Allemands apportaient aussi généralement par leur origine, aux classes laborieuses et rurales.

“ Il n'en était pas de même de nos compatriotes. Par leurs allures, leurs idées, leurs sentiments, leurs professions, leurs habitudes et leurs mœurs, ils présentaient dans leur ensemble, le caractère et la physionomie d'une population urbaine. Les ouvriers, de divers métiers, étaient nombreux; mais il y avait aussi des capitalistes, des négociants, des médecins, des professeurs, des notaires, des architectes; plus, un certain nombre d'anciens fonctionnaires publics, des journalistes, des hommes de lettres, des proscrits politiques, etc.; bref, beaucoup d'éléments excellents, avec un mélange de déclassés.” Lévy, *op cit.*, pp. 107, 108.

and they have not learned the English language. They are in the country, but not of it. . . .⁶

Certain it is that they did not confine themselves only to California. Saint-Amant found a few in Oregon as early as 1851—"ricochet de la Californie," as he termed it⁷—and the discovery of gold in British territory drew them still farther north; indeed, some were in the vanguard of the great rush.⁸

It is impossible at this time to hazard even a guess as to the number of French that came to British Columbia, but they were in sufficient number to be recognizable as a national group. Governor Douglas, in reporting the arrival on April 25, 1858, of the steamer *Commodore* with 450 passengers stated: "About 60 British subjects, with an equal number of native born Americans, the rest being chiefly Germans, with a smaller proportion of Frenchmen and Italians composed this body of adventurers."⁹ Several months later Douglas had revised his estimate upwards, for he reported:—

About two thirds of the emigrants from California are supposed to be English and French; the other third are Germans, and native citizens of the United States. There is no congeniality of feeling among the emigrants, and provided there be no generally felt grievance to unite them in one common cause there will, in my opinion, always be a great majority of the population ready to support the measures of Government.¹⁰

It is probable that the conditions found to be existing in British Columbia in comparison with those that had been experienced in California would be conducive to a considerable immigration of foreign miners. One of the principal differences was the absence in British Columbia of any discriminatory form of taxation. Licence fees might be vexatious, but all were required

(6) San Francisco *Alta California*, May 13, 1853.

(7) Saint-Amant, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

(8) Saint-Amant's comments regarding British territory in the Pacific Northwest are interesting: "Depuis la perte des régions au-dessous du 49^e degré, les Anglais donnent un peu plus d'attention et de surveillance aux possessions qui leur restent dans la *Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Les six cents blancs, tout au plus, qui forment la population de l'île *Vancouver*, parlent pourtant déjà de réclamer des libertés et des franchises locales comment le Canada. C'est la vue et le voisinage des établissements prospères des Américains qui leur donnent cet appétit précoce d'indépendance." *Ibid.*, p. 159.

(9) Douglas to Labouchere, May 8, 1858, *MS.*, Archives of B.C.

(10) Douglas to Lord Stanley, July 1, 1858, *MS.*, Archives of B.C.

to pay them. There was nothing comparable to the foreign miner's tax which in California had run as high as \$20 per month. Still later, when mining boards were established, admittedly with limited powers, there was no discrimination—British and foreign miners alike shared in membership.

An even more subtle indication of their relative position and one of particular satisfaction to the French, is to be found in the fact that Governor Douglas had early in his experience given official employment to one of the French miners. Mons. O. J. Travaillot, more popularly known as Captain Travaillot, had arrived in the colony in the early spring of 1858 and had pushed well into the Interior. From time to time he forwarded reports to the Governor, and in June he was appointed "Revenue officer for the District of Fort Dallas or Fork of Thompson's River," with power to issue licences to miners and to collect legal fees. In addition, he was empowered to "raise and maintain a force of eight men for the service of Government, and to swear in all persons who take out mining licenses as special constables, for the maintenance of law and order. . . ." ¹¹ Travaillot continued in his capacity as Assistant Gold Commissioner for many months, and he it was who, with Corp. William Fisher, R.E., surveyed and laid out the townsite of Hope, ¹² although his official district stretched from Lytton to the Fountain. It is interesting to note, in passing, that many of his official reports to the Governor were written in French and were so reproduced in Parliamentary Papers. ¹³ One cannot but wonder at the problem they may have posed for Government officials in New Westminster and Victoria. Travaillot remained a citizen of this Province until his death in 1879. ¹⁴

The most obvious evidence of the existence of a considerable body of Frenchmen in the colony was the establishment of a French-language newspaper at Victoria in September, 1858. *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle Calédonie* was in effect the fourth newspaper to begin publication in Victoria. Its proprietor, Paul

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) Douglas to Lytton, October 12, 1858, *MS.*, Archives of B.C.

(13) *Papers relative to the Affairs of British Columbia*, Part I, [Cmd. 2476], London, 1859, p. 21.

(14) *Victoria Colonist*, February 2, 1879.

de Garro, was reputed to be a French count who had been forced to leave France for political reasons in 1851. Presumably, in his newspaper venture in Vancouver Island de Garro had the support of Bishop Modeste Demers, for it was upon the old hand-press given to the prelate by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel of Paris that the newspaper was printed. Its editor was W. Thornton and the printer, Frederick Marriott, who had several months earlier begun the publication of his own newspaper, the *Vancouver Island Gazette*. The *Courrier* made its first appearance on September 11, 1858. De Garro was completely forthright in his announcement:—

AU PUBLIC FRANÇAIS.

En entreprenant la publication d'un journal français dans cette colonie, je ne me suis pas dissimulé les nombreuses difficultés que j'aurais à surmonter pour édifier une oeuvre durable.

Il m'a fallu en quelque sorte créer avec presque rien "Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie," cependant fort de la sympathie que mes compatriotes ne manqueront pas d'accorder à une feuille française, je suis hardiment entré dans la lice, comptant sur l'appui de mes amis et de tous ceux qui à un titre quelconque aiment le nom Français.

Je n'ai rien négligé pour rendre le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie aussi utile et intéressant que le comporte l'état actuel de la colonie.

J'ai obtenu le concours d'un rédacteur, dont la position et le nom bien connu ne pourront manquer d'être agréable au Public Français et Anglais. J'ai pris de mesures pour réprendre dans nos mines le plus grand nombre d'exemplaires possibles, je me suis déjà mis en relation avec l'intérieur, San Francisco et même La France, afin de pouvoir tenir les lecteurs de Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie au courant de tout ce qui peut les intéresser sur cette terre lointaine.

Si le concours de la communauté ne me fait pas défaut, j'espère que le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie tiendra plus qu'il ne promet et que le resultat sera aussi satisfaisant pour les interêts des uns et des autres que pour ceux de votre tour dévoué serviteur.

P. DE GARRO.¹⁵

(15) Victoria *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, September 11, 1858. A free translation of this statement follows:—

TO THE FRENCH PUBLIC.

In undertaking the publication of a French newspaper in this Colony I have no illusions as to the numerous difficulties that I shall have to surmount in order to build up a lasting work.

I have had in some way to bring into being from almost nothing the *Courier of New Caledonia*. However, sure of the sympathy which my compatriots will not fail to accord to a French paper, I am bravely entering the

Nor was he any less honest in announcing his policies:—

Organe des populations Françaises et Canadiennes, le *Courrier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* suivra une ligne indépendante, aucune considération quelconque ne le fera dévier dans sa marche, aussi longtemps que nous aurons l'honneur de tenir la plume; mais cette indépendance nous fera précisément un devoir de rendre justice à qui de droit et l'on nous trouvera toujours dans les rangs des défenseurs de la loi et des grands principes de liberté et de justice légués par la Constitution de la Grande Bretagne à ses glorieux enfants et à tous ceux qui vivent sous son égide.¹⁶

Not only was the *Courrier* to be the "Organ of the French population in the English Possessions" but it aimed to be a "political and literary journal" and with some justification for it did publish literary comment, including "Civilization in California," by Charles Dickens. It is also to be noted that de Garro printed Alfred Waddington's famous pamphlet *The Fraser Mines Vindicated*, one of the earliest colonial imprints. Launched originally as a tri-weekly, only nine issues are known to have been printed between September 11 and October 8, 1858. In addition, a weekly—"Edition Hebdomadaire pour les Mines les Etats Unis et l'Europe"—was projected and issued on September 18 and October 9. The early demise of this newspaper is probably accounted for by the fact that its clientele was too

lists counting on the support of my friends and of all those who for any reason whatever love the French name.

I have neglected nothing to make the *Courier* as useful and interesting considering the existing conditions of this colony.

I have obtained the services of an editor whose well-known name and position cannot fail to be agreeable to the French and English public. I have taken steps to have the greatest possible number of copies distributed to the mines and I have already established a connection with the interior, San Francisco and even France in order to keep the readers of the *Courier* aware of everything that might be of interest to them in this remote land.

If the co-operation of the community does not fail me I hope that the *Courier* will perform more than it promises and that the result will be as satisfying for the interests of everyone as for those of your devoted servant.

P. DE GARRO.

(16) *Ibid.* Organ of the French and Canadians, the *Courier* will follow an independent line; no consideration whatsoever will cause it to deviate from this course as long as we have the honor of holding the pen; but this independence gives us a precise obligation to render justice to the truth, and we will be always found ranged in the ranks of the defenders of law and the great principles of liberty and justice bequeathed by the Constitution of Great Britain to her glorious infants and to all who live under her protection.

limited, particularly during the first winter of the gold-rush. Presumably de Garro's plea "que le nerf de la guerre est l'argent, où pour nous son equivalent, les abonnements et les annonces"¹⁷ went unheeded. However, it should also be pointed out that its printer, Marriott, was of none too savoury a reputation and that he was shortly thereafter ushered out of the colony. De Garro, however, continued to reside in the colonies until, in 1861, he fell victim to the explosion which wrecked the steamer *Cariboo Fly* outside Victoria harbour.¹⁸

As would naturally be expected, many of the French gold-seekers, like the others, stayed but a short time in the colony. Discouraged by difficulties in reaching the mines, many returned to California. But there remained, particularly in Victoria, the nucleus of a permanent colony that exhibited many of the characteristics of its counterpart in San Francisco, yet with many differences worthy of note.

For one thing, evidently the French themselves were careful to differentiate themselves from the French-Canadians. In 1861 the *Victoria Colonist* reported the trial and conviction of a Frenchman, Noel Le Clerc, but in the next issue made a point of stating that he was "not a Frenchman, but a native of the Canadas, and of French descent."¹⁹

Moreover, it is obvious that the French were made welcome in the colonies. Towards the end of 1861 it was rumoured that many French families in San Francisco were making preparations to come to Victoria and British Columbia. Of this event the *Colonist* wrote: "Let them come. We'll give them a hearty welcome. The French are quiet, orderly, industrious, and thrifty colonists. The more we have the better."²⁰ Several years later a contemporary newspaper reported:—

While speaking of our French fellow citizens we may call attention to the remarkable fact that no native of La Belle France has ever been brought before a Police Magistrate [for] disorderly or criminal conduct since the establishment of the Colony.²¹

(17) *Ibid.* . . . that the sinews of war is money or for us its equivalent—subscriptions and advertisements.

(18) *Victoria Colonist*, August 3, 1861.

(19) *Ibid.*, January 31, February 2, 1861.

(20) *Ibid.*, November 25, 1861.

(21) *Victoria The Vancouver Times*, March 6, 1865.

While not strictly true, nevertheless the fact remained that by and large the French proved themselves to be a law-abiding people.

But what is much more to the point, the criticism levelled against the French in California that they were "in the country but not of it" never applied in British Columbia. Presumably the experience of nearly a decade of life in California before coming northward is partially responsible. Very definitely they were "of the colony." In some instances they did retain national characteristics and functions, but in the main they fused their identity with general community life and affairs. Possibly the relatively small population in the colony made this all the more necessary. In San Francisco they had organized and maintained their own volunteer fire brigade—La Compagnie Lafayette des Echelles et Crochets²²—but in Victoria they participated actively in the volunteer brigades as organized amongst the general population.²³ Many of them were Masons and joined with their fellow colonists in the affairs of that ancient craft.

There is no evidence of criticism being levelled against them for their failure to speak English. It is probably not without significance that Edward Mallandaine when advertising his "Select School" in 1860 added a special note, in French incidentally, to the effect that "French gentleman are invited to take an evening course in English, and to send their children to Mr. Mallandaine."²⁴ In this connection the career of Mons. B. Deffis in the colony is interesting. Formerly a lieutenant in the French Army under Louis Phillipe, he had come to California after the Revolution of 1848 and later came on to British Columbia.²⁵ It was his custom to spend the summers working in the mines and the winters in Victoria, where for several years he evidently conducted well-patronized classes in French, Spanish,

(22) Lévy, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 200.

(23) See F. W. Laing and W. Kaye Lamb, "The Fire Companies of Old Victoria," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, X, (1946), pp. 43-75, *passim*.

(24) *Victoria Colonist*, May 17, 1860. "Messrs. les Français sont invités à faire un cours d'Anglais le soir, et à envoyer leurs enfants chez M. Mallandaine."

(25) *Ibid.*, November 21, 1873.

and English.²⁶ He was a man of some considerable scientific training and for several years acted as the Cariboo correspondent for the *Victoria Colonist*, providing interesting and detailed reports on mining activity. Indeed, it was he who acted as their correspondent on the Big Bend "rush" in 1866, and sent out the report that frankly warned the public of possible overoptimism. Typical of his sane reporting is the following:—

I consider that undue excitements have to a great extent contributed to the general state of depression under which the country is laboring. I shall say this much. This quartz discovery may still prove to be a "fizzle," though we have the greatest confidence that the reverse will be the case. Should the lead turn out as we anticipate, a new era of unparalleled prosperity will dawn upon these Colonies, as it will pave the way to the discovery of many new lodes in this part of British Columbia.²⁷

Quartz-mining was his main interest, and he discovered a lode in the vicinity of Williams Creek in 1868 and remained in the Cariboo until his death by accident in the South Wales claim on Lightning Creek in 1873.²⁸

As previously suggested, in some ways, particularly culturally, the French colony tried to maintain its individuality. For example, in January, 1861, they organized their own choral society—*La Société des Enfants de Paris*²⁹—presumably following the pattern of a similar society organized in San Francisco in 1855.³⁰ This group was under the direction of Mons. George Sandrie, who was also the conductor of the pioneer Victoria musical society, the Philharmonic. Its first concert, presenting an all-French programme, was held under the distinguished patronage of Governor Douglas and was well received. The *Colonist* reported:—

The theatre was comfortably filled with ladies and gentlemen, and we have no hesitation in saying that no entertainment of the kind ever given here afforded more real satisfaction than that of last evening. . . . The conductor deserves great praise for the state of efficiency to which he has brought his company of amateurs; and we trust that the Society will become a permanent institution in our city, and that our residents will enjoy many entertainments of a like nature.³¹

(26) *Ibid.*, October 31, 1864; December 11, 1865; October 29, 1866.

(27) *Ibid.*, August 31, 1866.

(28) *Ibid.*, November 21, 1873.

(29) *Ibid.*, January 29, 1861; July 22, 1861.

(30) Lévy, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

(31) *Victoria Colonist*, August 17, 1861.

The group was composed of thirty to forty members and gave a second concert early in September,³² but no further notice is made of the society, and the assumption is that it was absorbed by its English counterpart, the Philharmonic. An incident in the career of its conductor, Mons. Sandrie, indicates the harmony existing between the French and the citizens generally. As he grew older and became confined to his home, a benefit ball was planned for him in 1870, about which the *Colonist* wrote:—

All classes appear anxious to assist the worthy couple, who have grown old here and of late have become incapacitated, by reason of their infirmities from earning a livelihood. The case is one that appeals directly to the tender sympathy of all, and if we know Victorians as well as we think we do, the appeal will not be in vain.³³

It would be interesting to trace the activity of many of the leading members of the French colony in British Columbia, but the detailed research involved yet remains to be done. Sufficient evidence, however, has come to light to lead one to believe that British Columbia was singularly fortunate in those it attracted. Many of the leaders of the French colony in San Francisco transferred themselves to the colony. Possibly the fact that the immigration here was entirely a voluntary matter—there is no record of any assistance by emigration societies—accounts in a large measure for the type of Frenchman that came. In passing, mention will be made of only three typical individuals.

One of the earliest Frenchwomen to arrive in San Francisco was Mme. V. A. Pettibeu, who is remembered there for her activity in the field of education. In fact, in conjunction with two other women, she opened, in 1853, the first girls' school in that city—"un pensionnat de jeunes filles."³⁴ She transferred her activity to British Columbia in the early months of the gold-rush and for a time, at least, taught in the school instituted by Bishop Demers. Shortly thereafter she opened her own school, as an advertisement in the *Victoria Gazette* indicates:—

Madame Pettibeu informs the public that she has opened a Seminary for Young Ladies, on Fort Street, between Government and Broad street.

Lessons given in French and Music.

For terms and references apply at the School.³⁵

(32) *Ibid.*, August 28, 1861.

(33) *Ibid.*, May 10, 1870.

(34) Lévy, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

(35) *Victoria Gazette*, March 10, 1859.

British Columbia became her permanent home, for she lived here until her death on April 20, 1880, when the *Colonist* noted: "We regret to announce the death last evening of Madame Pettibeu, a very early resident of this city, and for many years a successful school teacher."³⁶ Her funeral, conducted by Bishop Cridge, was attended by many of the leading citizens of the community.³⁷

The other two are men who came to occupy prominent places in the commercial and social life of Victoria—Jules Rueff and Sosthenès Driard. Both of these men came to British Columbia in 1858—Reuff to engage successfully as a merchant and Driard equally successfully as a hotel proprietor. Driard became, in effect, the leader of the French community, and his hotels, the Colonial and Driard House, the centre of activity. He was a native of Lachapelle and left France in the revolutionary period for New Orleans, whence he went to California in 1850.³⁸ The interesting fact about these two friends is that while in San Francisco, in company with Mons. J. Vaillant, they were responsible for the establishment of a *Maison d'Asile* for the sick and destitute who were not members of the French Benevolent Society. This shelter had accommodation for forty-four persons, and while it had only a short existence, it paved the way for the establishment of a municipal alms-house.³⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that with such a record of philanthropy behind them in San Francisco, they soon set about to provide similar assistance in their new home.

As a result of their activity, there was founded on February 24, 1860, *La Société Français de Bienfaisance et Secours Mutuels de Victoria*—or as it came to be called, "The French Benevolent Society." Since this organization in so many respects symbolizes French activity in British Columbia, a more detailed examination of it is in order, for its effects are felt even to this day. In the first place the date of its establishment is significant. February 24 was the anniversary of the overthrow of Louis Phillippe, and

(36) *Victoria Colonist*, April 21, 1880.

(37) *Ibid.*, April 24, 1880.

(38) *Ibid.*, February 16, 1873.

(39) Lévy, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-202.

the organization of this society on that date provides, at least to a degree, a clue as to the political affiliations of many of the French that came to the colony. In addition, the society provides a further example of the degree to which the "principle of Association" had become a French national characteristic. This principle had come very much to the fore in the latter days of Louis Phillipe's reign and was the basis of the form of socialism advocated by Fourier and his fellows. The emigration societies mentioned earlier were still another exemplification, and while they, for the most part, ended in failure, the benevolent societies were unusually successful.

At the time of the organization of the French Benevolent Society, the *Colonist* commented:—

We learn with pleasure that a French Benevolent Society has recently been inaugurated in town on the principle of mutual relief for the sick. It will be supported by a small monthly subscription open to persons of all nations, and who thereby will become entitled to the benefit of the institution. The bye-laws of the Society are in a great measure adopted from those of the French Benevolent Society of San Francisco, which rendered immense services to the sick and distressed of California, and which began under the humblest auspices and is now one of the important Institutions of the State. We certainly think such an establishment is highly creditable to the French people.⁴⁰

The contemporary *Gazette* was equally complimentary to the sponsors:—

The French residents in this Town, like Frenchmen in all foreign countries, form an orderly, industrious, and highly respectable body, have established a mutual relief Society in this Colony. The public should encourage and support all such useful and charitable institutions, for they do an incalculable amount of good in all communities.⁴¹

Immediate action was taken to implement the plans. A house was rented from Alfred Waddington and refitted as a hospital, with accommodation for twenty patients,⁴² and by June it was ready to open its doors.⁴³

(40) *Victoria Colonist*, March 6, 1860.

(41) *Victoria Gazette*, March 7, 1860. For details on the organization of the French Benevolent Society of San Francisco see Lévy, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-188.

(42) *Victoria Colonist*, March 24, 1860.

(43) *Victoria Gazette*, June 8, 1860. At that time the board of directors was as follows: P. Corbiniere, president; A. Ledrier, vice-president; T. Perrodin, treasurer; L. A. Henselin, secretary; H. Banel; J. Bigne; A.

To-day, as we are embarking upon a Province-wide scheme of hospitalization, this pioneer venture in co-operation is doubly interesting. The rates were almost ridiculously low—\$1 per month. This entitled the subscriber to admission to the hospital, the services of a physician, and free medicines. Non-subscribers could take advantage of the hospital facilities at a prescribed rate of \$2 per day. There was no restriction as to nationality, the only stipulation being that a majority of the members of the executive committee administering the institution should be Frenchmen and that all proceedings were to be kept in the French language.⁴⁴

The physician in charge was Dr. Nicolet Michel Clerjon, who had been practising in the colony since September, 1858. He was a native of Paris and his first advertisement gave pertinent, if amusing, information:—

Dr. C. is a student of the Medical Academy and Clynique of Paris; has practised a long time in China, where Fevers, Dysentery, Rheumatism and other diseases were dreadful; and for the last eight years in California. Has been "Medicin en Chef" of the French Asylum Benevolent Society of San Francisco.

Persons leaving the city can receive advice and Medicines, with directions for the treatment of all diseases at a moderate charge.

Treatment purely Vegetable.⁴⁵

Dr. Clerjon retained his position until his death in February, 1864,⁴⁶ when he was succeeded by Dr. I. W. Powell,⁴⁷ who held the position until his resignation in 1872 and his replacement by Dr. John Ash.⁴⁸

By 1865 the society had prospered to such an extent that a new hospital had been built, newly furnished, and entirely free of debt, according to a report in the *Vancouver Times*:—

In February, 1860 a few noble minded Frenchmen originated the idea, and subscribed money in shares to purchase a lot of ground and erect a hospital for the sick. They have lately replaced the first building with a more handsome, well arranged, and substantial structure. They have also newly

Casamayou; S. Driard; P. Manetta; J. Rueff; J. B. Timmerman; Dr. N. M. Clerjon, physician.

(44) For the detailed rules and regulations of the society see the Appendix to this article.

(45) *Victoria Gazette*, September 3, 1858.

(46) *Victoria Colonist*, February 26, 1864.

(47) *Ibid.*, April 29, 1864.

(48) *Ibid.*, December 10, 1872.

furnished it, and the whole stands free from debt or embarrassment. There is no better accomodation for the sick in the town than this noble institution. There are six beds, and the doors are open to men of all nations.⁴⁹

The French hospital, with its tricolour fluttering in the breeze, was one of the landmarks near Humboldt street.⁵⁰ Despite the hard times through which the colony was passing, it continued to flourish, although the rates for non-members were eventually raised to \$3 per day.⁵¹ In 1870 extensive alterations and additions were made to the existing building,⁵² and yet the society was still able to report a cash surplus out at interest. Apart from the subscription fees, it was financed by an annual picnic and tombola usually held early in August,⁵³ which was one of *the* events of the year—indeed, a civic half-holiday was occasionally

(49) Victoria *The Vancouver Times*, March 6, 1865.

(50) Victoria *Colonist*, January 17, 1867. "The French people are proverbial wherever they go for the careful provision they make for their own sick and needy. The pedestrian, winding his way to Beacon Hill, must have often seen the tricolor fluttering in the breeze from a building near Humboldt Street, and probably concluded that it indicated the French Consulate, but such is not the case; this same flag is the flag of humanity, unfolded over the abode of the sick. Six years ago, our French residents established a Society for benevolent purposes, and we are glad to hear, that the society has continued to prosper ever since, so that, what was at the outset but a bud, has ripened into a fruit bearing tree. By dint of frugal management on the part of those entrusted with the finances of the Society a lot with a nicely furnished house has been secured, affording all the comfort and accommodation needed for the inmates; and a good sum of money invested at interest for the benefit of the Institution."

(51) *Ibid.*, November 20, 1868.

(52) *Ibid.*, June 21, July 1, August 14, September 6, 1870. "The contractor, Mr. D. F. Adams, has virtually completed the new wing of the French Hospital, raised the old building twelve feet and converted the establishment into one of the most complete and beautiful Maison de Santés on the Pacific Coast. There is such an air of comfort—a rest-and-be-thankfulness—and cleanliness and neatness withal—pervading the establishment that the prospect of a long illness is robbed of half its terrors. The establishment contains spacious suites of rooms for male and female patients, three bath rooms—one on the Russian principle—drawing-room, kitchen, closets, &c. A wide piazza surrounds the building. The grounds are about one acre in extent and will be laid out with walks and beds, and planted with flowers, shrubbery and fruit trees." *Ibid.*, September 7, 1870.

(53) *Ibid.*, September 6, 1870; July 21, 1872; August 3, 1873; August 2, 1874; August 8, 1875.

proclaimed for the event.⁵⁴ Every year, too, there was an anniversary dinner,⁵⁵ which, in effect, was a gathering together of all public-spirited organizations—the fire brigades, Germania Sing Verein, and Turn Verein, the Caledonian Benevolent Society, and the like.

Throughout its career the annual financial statements as published in the newspapers with but one exception revealed an increase of assets over liabilities.⁵⁶ Nor were its benefits confined only to Victoria, for there were corresponding members for New Westminster, Burrard Inlet, Nanaimo, Clinton, Lillooet, Quesnel, and Cariboo.

Of slightly more than passing interest is an item that appeared in the *Colonist* of June 28, 1870, commenting on a projected medical aid society for London, England:—

The *Lancet* is opposed to the principle of the association as constituting the first step towards reducing the whole profession to the level of a trade. In whatever light it may be regarded by the profession there can be little doubt that such an association is in the interest of so dense a community as that of London. In new and thin communities there is far less reason for such combinations, but even in Victoria, we find a similar principle recognized by the French Benevolent Society, whose members are entitled to command medical attendance at less than half the current rates.⁵⁷

The society and its hospital always commanded the loyal support of the community. In 1873, when Frenchmen the world over were straining to aid La Belle France, the *Colonist* wrote:—

It cannot but be admitted that its originators and their countrymen here have good cause to rejoice at the signal success which has crowned their

(54) *Ibid.*, September 4, 1870.

(55) *Ibid.*, January 21, 1867; March 25, 1868; February 26, 1869; February 25, 1870.

(56)	Year.	Hospital and Lot.	Furniture and Equipment.	Cash and Invested Assets.	
	1867	\$1,225.00	\$375.00	\$1,030.37.	<i>Ibid.</i> , February 20, 1868.
	1868	1,225.00	375.00	1,267.45.	<i>Ibid.</i> , February 13, 1869.
	1869	1,225.00	425.00	1,689.93.	<i>Ibid.</i> , February 13, 1870.
	1870	4,087.00	795.00	177.16.	<i>Ibid.</i> , February 4, 1871.
	1871	4,645.28	873.00	65.40.	<i>Ibid.</i> , February 4, 1872.
	1872	4,940.30	982.31	723.64.	<i>Ibid.</i> , January 29, 1873.
	1873	5,345.06	1,010.93	1,331.38.	<i>Ibid.</i> , January 13, 1874.
	1874	5,345.06	1,010.93	2,052.65.	<i>Ibid.</i> , January 27, 1875.
	1875	5,345.06	1,010.93	1,911.96.	<i>Ibid.</i> , January 18, 1876.
	1876	5,345.06	1,010.93	1,964.30.	<i>Ibid.</i> , January 17, 1877.

(57) *Ibid.*, June 28, 1870.

efforts at relieving suffering humanity. Its past administrations . . . have been composed, for the most part, of Frenchmen; and to their harmonious working, intelligent effort and conscientious discharge of duties do we now owe an institution which is in every way a credit to this city. May national pride long find in such worthy objects cause upon which to plume itself. . . . Long may the French flag float over such works of peace and charity.⁵⁸

In 1872 a special event took place when a presentation was made to the founder, Sosthenès Driard.⁵⁹ It was a timely gesture, for before the next anniversary could be celebrated Driard was dead.

Everywhere, yesterday, there was heard but one expression, and that of keen regret, when it became known that Mons. Sosthenes M. Driard, proprietor of the Colonial Hotel and Driard House, had breathed his last. He will be sorely missed, for in truth he was a good and active man, first and foremost in every charitable work.⁶⁰

Still further indication of the high esteem in which he had been held is the fact that the Legislative Assembly adjourned its proceedings in order to permit its members to attend the funeral.⁶¹ That year, too, saw Jules Rueff return to France in search of health. But in two years he, too, was dead.⁶²

Their work lived on, for it was not until 1884 that the hospital was closed, but even then the members continued to be eligible for weekly sick benefits,⁶³ and operating on that basis the society

(58) *Ibid.*, January 29, 1873.

(59) *Ibid.*, March 2, 1872.

(60) *Ibid.*, February 16, 1873.

(61) *Ibid.*, February 18, 1873.

(62) *Ibid.*, September 1, 1875. "Mr. Rueff came to the Province in 1858 and early embarked in business as a merchant, etc. He remained there till 1873 when he returned to France to recover his health. . . . Mr. Rueff was a valuable and public-spirited citizen. He always took great interest in charitable institutions, was one of the founders of the French Benevolent Society in 1860, and was a prominent Mason and Odd Fellow."

(63) "At a meeting of the Directors held last Sunday at the Driard House it was resolved that the institution be closed and the building and grounds of the hospital sold. The sum gained thereby to be deposited in the bank, new by-laws to be framed, subscriptions continued, and members to be paid when in sickness, a certain weekly sum to be afterwards decided upon. It will be conducted upon a similar basis to the Odd Fellows, etc." *Ibid.*, January 22, 1884. "The committee met again last evening when it was resolved that the hospital should be closed for the present and that the members should be paid, when sick, \$10 per week, with medical attendance." *Ibid.*, February 29, 1884.

continued to flourish. In 1890 the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria was incorporated, and provision was made that when a satisfactory arrangement had been effected between the board of directors of the hospital and the executive committee of the French Benevolent Society for the transfer of the property of the French Hospital by Order in Council, the latter society would be given the right to elect three representatives to the board of directors of the Royal Jubilee Hospital.⁶⁴ Almost immediately negotiations for an amalgamation were begun, at which time it was pointed out that it would be "quite a help to the Jubilee Hospital as the property is worth from \$10,000 to \$12,000."⁶⁵ A mutually satisfactory plan was agreed upon in October,⁶⁶ and by Order in Council of April 6, 1891, the arrangement was formally ratified. In this way the French Hospital went out of existence. The members of the society in good standing became "life members" of the Royal Jubilee Hospital, entitling them, amongst other things, to receive "free of charge the treatment of a first-class day patient."⁶⁷ How well Driard and Rueff had laid the foundations is reflected in the fact that at this time of writing two

(64) "An Act to Incorporate the Provincial Royal Jubilee Hospital," chapter 37, *Statutes of the Province of British Columbia, 1890*, Victoria, 1890, section 19, p. 48.

(65) *Victoria Colonist*, April 22, 1890.

(66) *Ibid.*, October 9, 1890.

(67) Order in Council No. 114 of 1891, dated April 6th, contained the agreement. It continued the provision regarding representation on the board of directors and formally transferred Lots 1197, 1198, and part of 1199 in Block 28 and the buildings to the Royal Jubilee Hospital. The exact provision regarding existing members of the French Benevolent Society read: ". . . all the present members of the French Benevolent and Mutual Society shall become life members of the Provincial Royal Jubilee Hospital, the term 'life member' being understood to mean one who is entitled to receive free of charge the treatment of a first-class day patient at the said Hospital, and who shall enjoy all the rights, benefits and privileges of the Provincial Royal Jubilee Hospital, except the right to vote for the election of the Directors at the Annual Meeting. Provided always that the Directors of the Hospital shall only be bound to receive a member in to the pay patients' wards when unoccupied, but room shall be provided at all times at the Hospital to such members when actually in need of hospital treatment." It is interesting to note that as recently as 1937-38 the privilege of electing representatives to the board of directors of the hospital was at least partially used.

British Columbians may claim exemption under the present hospitalization scheme by virtue of their membership in the old French Benevolent Society.

The activities of this society have been detailed at some length to indicate not only a significant accomplishment of the French residents of the Province, but also to show the reaction of the British population to their efforts. In all probability Paul de Garro's statement of faith in support of British institutions was generally acceptable to his countrymen. Certainly in the testing-time provided by the depression following the collapse of the Cariboo "boom" their loyalty never wavered. While other foreign elements in the population might support the annexationist movement and even sign the petition, such was not the case for the French.⁶⁸

Nor did time and distance dim their love for France. There was an immediate response to the appeal made by the French Consul-General in San Francisco on behalf of the families of soldiers killed or wounded in the Franco-Prussian War.⁶⁹ Still later when France was struggling to pay off the huge indemnity demanded of her by Prussia in way of reparations, aid was forthcoming from Victoria. All the proceeds of the celebration held in connection with the reopening of Driard House in the spring of 1872 were devoted to the "National Subscription."

The projectors are true sons of *La Belle France*, and not only shall have the support of their fellow countrymen but of all nationalities. Today the Tri-colored flag of Old France will mingle in friendly harmony with the Union Jack and the Star-spangled Banner, and people of every race will join in the endeavor to ransom Britain's ally.⁷⁰

Such then is the story of the French in British Columbia, albeit hastily and perhaps too casually surveyed. That their influence is not more readily recognizable to-day arises from a variety of factors. In numbers they were always relatively few, and it could hardly be expected that they might perpetuate themselves as a distinctive entity. Moreover, many of the early settlers did return to the homeland in the 1870's and 1880's, and

(68) See Willard E. Ireland (ed.), "The Annexation Petition of 1869," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, IV (1940), pp. 267-287, *passim*.

(69) *Victoria Colonist*, September 1, 1870.

(70) *Ibid.*, May 4, 1872. Lévy, *op. cit.*, p. 295, states that in the National Subscription for 1872 the sum of \$157.50 was raised in British Columbia.

the influx of population at the completion of the transcontinental railway submerged those that remained. But theirs is a pleasant heritage — an industrious, loyal, philanthropic people with a vivid, social consciousness.

WILLARD E. IRELAND.

PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES,
VICTORIA, B.C.

APPENDIX.

FRENCH BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.*

Founded at Victoria, V.I., February 24th, 1860.

RULES AND REGULATIONS.

Art. 1.—The Society is instituted for a benevolent purpose, and mutual help in cases of sickness; it does not, nor ever will, entertain any political or religious question.

2.—Every Frenchman or foreigner may become a member of it.

3.—The number of members is unlimited.

4.—The monthly subscription of each member is fixed at ONE DOLLAR. To become a member it is necessary to be in good health, pay in addition to the monthly subscription an Entrance Fee of not less than ONE DOLLAR, and sign a copy of the Rules and Regulations.

5.—The payments are to be made dating from the first of each month, to the Collector of the Society, and in his absence to the Treasurer, to one of the Members of the Committee, or to the Manager of the Society's Hospital. In the Mining Districts the Corresponding Members of the Society shall receive subscriptions, deliver receipts for the same, and furnish a copy of the Rules and Regulations.

6.—The members, provided they subscribed when in good health, shall enjoy the rights, benefits and privileges of the Society, one month after the first subscription; but these rights, benefits and privileges are forfeited by allowing three months to elapse without making the usual payments. The rights may, however, be enjoyed before a month in cases of fracture or other unfortunate and unforeseen accident. The Committee shall have power to decide on such admissions.

* Reproduced from a printed form used in the year 1870 and issued to Mr. John Connell. [Now preserved in the Archives of B.C.]

7.—Every person suffering from acute, chronic or other malady, reputed incurable at the time of his first subscription, shall not have the right of admission to the Society's Hospital nor a claim to medical attendance.

8.—Members suffering from Syphilitic disease shall pay ONE DOLLAR per day during the course of their treatment inside of the Hospital; outside they shall have the right of gratuitous consultation, and to have the medicines furnished at the reduced prices of the Society.

9.—All medicines ordered by the Doctors of the Society will be delivered gratuitously at the Pharmacy of the Society, with the exception of those mentioned in Art. 8.

10.—No Patient shall be allowed to participate in any of the advantages or privileges of the Society, unless he presents his subscription paper in good order and signed by him. Should the member, however, have lost it, the Executive Committee shall examine the registry of subscriptions, and on finding that the claimant has observed all the rules and regulations of the Society, his demand shall be allowed.

11.—Ex-Members of the Society shall be allowed to re-enter the Society, on the same conditions as the new members.

12.—A Legal Adviser, or Minister of any Religious Denomination, shall be immediately called in, upon the expressed desire of a member or other patient.

13.—The Society receives donations and other special gifts, of whatever kind they may be, and applies them conformantly to the wishes of the Donor.

14.—Every sick person not being a member, without regard to nationality, is admissible to the Hospital at the rate of TWO DOLLARS per diem. They will receive every attention. Private rooms will be held at the disposition of members, at the rate of ONE DOLLAR per diem, and at the rate of \$1.50, if the member is suffering from some Syphilitic disease, and at the rate of THREE DOLLARS per diem for patients not being members.

Executive Committee.

15.—The Committee is composed as follows: A President, a Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and Seven Directors.

This Committee shall be elected in general meeting by a majority of votes. The majority of the members of said Committee shall be composed of Frenchmen, and all proceedings shall be kept in the French language. Rules and Regulations shall, however, be printed in English.

16.—The Committee shall be elected for one year, and it shall elect its own officers.

17.—The Committee shall be renewed each year by election. One or more of the outgoing members may be re-elected.

18.—No member shall be admitted to vote, unless he has belonged to the Society for at least two months.

19.—Every person elected as a member of the Committee must become a member of the Society, if he is not so already.

20.—The Medical Gentleman in charge of the Hospital shall not be a member of the Committee. He must elect for one or the other position.

21.—The Committee will appoint a Collector for the Society, who shall attend at the sittings and give his opinion on measures to be voted by said Committee.

22.—The members of the Committee will meet according to the Rules and Regulations, which are to guide them.

23.—Six members of the Committee shall form a quorum.

24.—The President, or in his absence the Vice President, shall direct the course of business brought before the meetings, and announce the decisions voted by the majority.

25.—At each monthly meeting the Treasurer shall present a report of the receipts and expenditure. The Collector shall furnish the Treasurer an exact statement of all subscriptions and other sums received by him for the Society, and present a monthly report to the Committee.

26.—The Treasurer shall not pay any funds unless the accounts are approved and signed by the President, or the members of the Special Committee; all accounts having reference to the Hospital must, before payment, be approved by the Manager.

27.—One of the Secretaries shall keep the minutes of the meetings, and have charge of the correspondence.

28.—The Treasurer shall receive, direct from the Corresponding Members, the amount received by them for subscriptions, and the Collector shall acknowledge such payments, and furnish all necessary and useful information to said correspondents.

29.—Two members of the Committee shall be alternately and monthly appointed to act as a Special Committee, to examine strictly into all that concerns the administration of the Society, and about the care taken of the sick; their duty shall also consist in examining attentively the account of expenses at the hospital before approving them.

30.—In case of resignation, absence, or death of one or more members of the Committee, an election shall take place within three months in a general meeting of the members of the Society; said meeting to take place at the room of the Committee, and notice given at least eight days previously.

31.—The Manager of the Hospital shall attend at the sittings of the Committee, and give his opinion on measures to be voted by said Committee.

32.—The Corresponding Members may attend the sittings of the Committee, and give their opinion on measures to be voted by said

Committee. They shall send every month to the Treasurer the amount received by them, with the names of the members to whom these payments are to be applied.

33.—An election for members of the Executive Committee shall take place every year in the beginning of January.

34.—All modifications, alterations, or additions to the rules and regulations, shall be made in general meeting of the subscribers, and all general meetings shall be preceded by a preparatory meeting, at least fifteen days previous to said general meeting; eight days' notice must be given of said preparatory meeting.

35.—A quarterly report of the situation of the Society shall be posted at the Hospital and in three public establishments of Victoria.

Regulations for Subscribers.

1.—Three members out of Victoria may choose a member correspondent for their locality, and pay him their subscriptions. Upon notice being given to the Treasurer to that effect, the Committee will forward subscription papers and the necessary authority to collect.

2.—The consultations take place at the Hospital.

3.—All patients, members or others, having cause to complain, shall, if at the Hospital, apply to the Manager of the Hospital or to the Special Committee; if at home, to the President of the Society.

4.—All letters, complaint or information, may be addressed to the Members of the Committee at the Hospital.

President: S. DRIARD. *Vice President:* JULES RUEFF.
Treasurer: J. KRIEMLER. *Secretary:* H. PASSERARD.

Directors:

FELIX LELOUIS. PIERRE FISSET.
JOHN VOGEL.

Physician, Surgeon: DR. POWELL.