

French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota

ARTICLE DU MOIS

ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

April 2021



Woman Weaving - La Baie, Saguenay, Québec - 1980s
Photo courtesy of Gervais Gilbert



Mission Statement: To preserve and promote the French-American heritage in Minnesota through education and community events.

Website: fahfminn.org. YouTube: FAHF Minn.



A French-Canadian Tradition



EASTER WATER



Happy Easter Everyone!

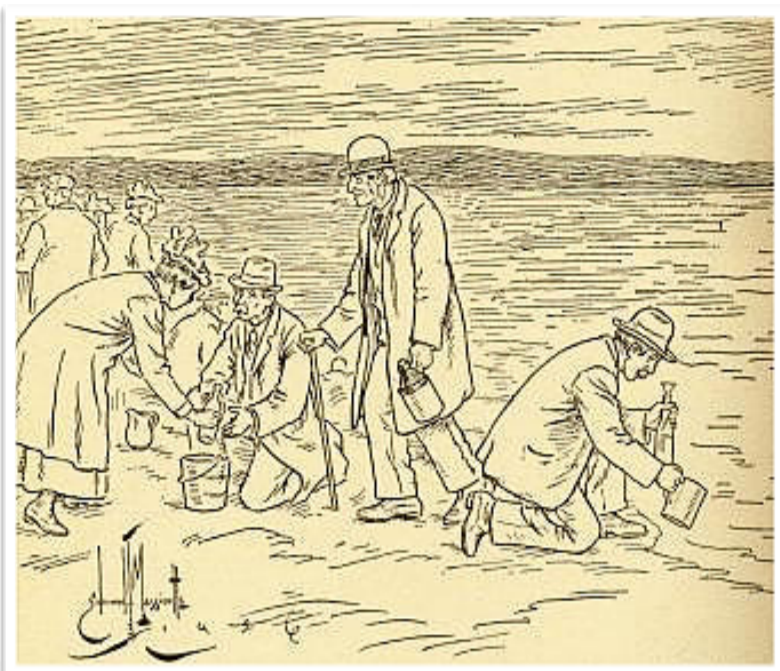
Growing up in the 1980s, every Easter, my parents would pack the car and put my younger siblings and me in the back of it and we would drive about seven and a half hours to go visit my grandmother who lived in La Baie (now called Ville de Saguenay) in the Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean region. It was an adventure to go that far in our belle province. We felt that we were travelling to a different country almost. Mainly because of their accent and some words that were so different from what we were used to. My mother had lost her accent from all those years living in the Laurentians, but as soon as



Baie des Ha! Ha!, Ville de Saguenay, Québec
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

she would see the bay appearing at the bottom of the valley with the majestic fjords of the Saguenay River, her accent came back alive and ready. The Saguenay people call their region a "royaume" or kingdom and they are very proud of it. The scenery is majestic indeed. For them, the water in the Baie des Ha! Ha! is like the sea because it is salty and has a tide.

Grand-maman would welcome us with wide-open arms and would spoil us rotten. Her refrigerator and cupboards were overfilled with goodies for our stay there. I swear she stocked all kinds of cookie brands that you could find at a grocery store! Plus, she would spend the week prior to our arrival baking dozens of sweets for our utmost pleasure. Oh, yes, celebrating Easter at grand-maman's was phenomenal and there was a whirlwind of family members and friends coming in and out of the house to see us (we would visit



Easter Water Collection - Source: Réseau de diffusion des archives du Québec - BAnQ

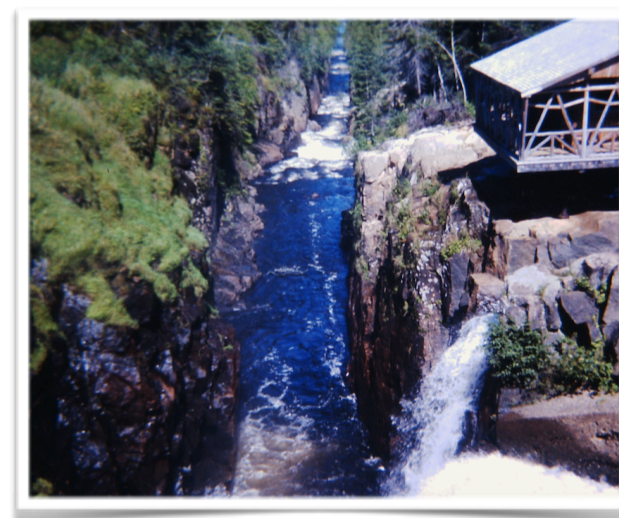
twice a year). I was trying my best to keep up the pace and figuring in my head which family branches these people were from. Like we say in Québec, families are “tricottées serrées” which translates to close-knit.

Easter Water

What was fun for us kids was to wake up before the break of dawn to go collect “l’eau de Pâques” or Easter water. It is said that for just a couple of hours between Saturday and Easter Sunday, the waters of a river or stream would become holy. But not just any kind of body of water. It should come from a river,

stream or source that was not stagnant. You had to go collect the water before sunrise, counter-current and in silence or while praying. At the Grand-Messe de Pâques (Easter High Mass), you would bring it to be blessed by the priest. Then you would keep this water all year long without it turning bad. It was said that this water had healing benefits.

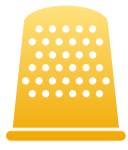
My uncle told me that, in his youth, they would walk to the Rivière-à-Mars to collect the water. In those times (1950s), the waters were clear and you could drink from it. Grand-maman also thought that the Easter water would protect the house when there was a big thunderstorm. She would splash a little water at the windows and walls. Also, when someone was sick they would trace a sign of a cross with the Easter water on the sick person’s forehead to help the healing process.



Bec-Scie & Rivière-à-Mars Canyon, Saguenay
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

Therefore, we would wake up super early on Easter morning to go with my uncle and aunt to the source near the Centre Plein Air Bec-Scie (Bec-Scie Outdoor Center), where that same Rivière-à-Mars had her canyon, to collect this holy water.

That is my story about the Easter water.



La Catalogne - A French-Canadian Craft

Do you have an object that reminds you fondly of one of your ancestors? Mine does more than that, it keeps me warm and comforts me. Every night, I wrap myself in it and I fall asleep smiling. I am talking about my very own catalogne blanket that my late maternal grandmother made for me when I was younger.

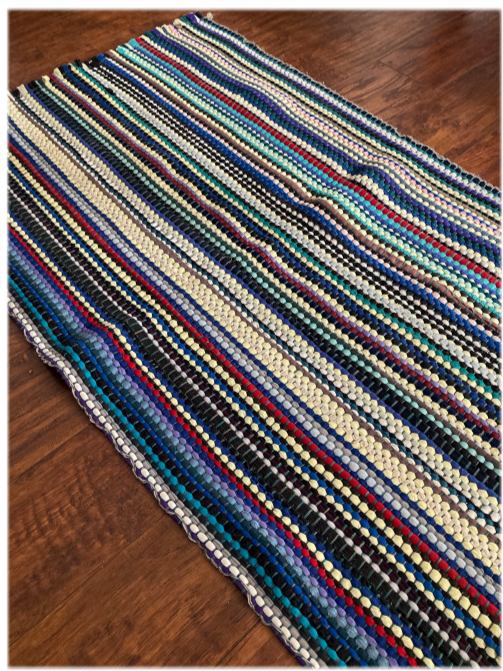
First, what is a catalogne? I am not talking about the northeastern region of Spain whose capital is Barcelona. I am referring to a French-Canadian type of blanket or rug woven on a loom with pieces of old fabrics. We can trace back these blankets to the beginning of the 17th century.¹ One of the first to own a catalogne that we know of was Jeanne Mance, one of the founders of

Montreal. To this day, we still don't know the origins of the name. In the

book *Glossaire du parler Français au Canada* published in Québec in 1930, it is said that they also found the catalogne name (meaning a woolen or cotton blanket) in the French regions of Auvergne, Normandie (Normandy), Picardie (Picardy), Savoie (Savoy), Bourgogne (Burgundy) and Bretagne (Brittany). See map on next page for their locations within France. In some parts of Québec, such as the Île d'Orléans, a catalogne is more of a rug (see left image).



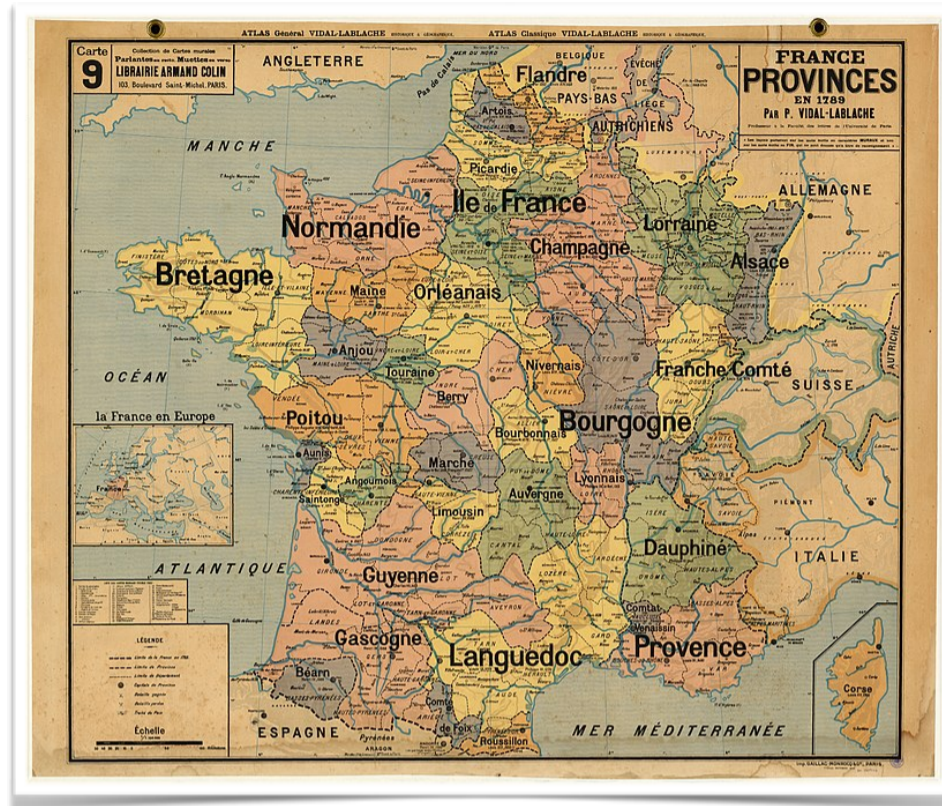
Catalogne Woven by Jeanne d'Arc Bouchard
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur



Catalogne Rug, Wisconsin
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

¹ Séguin, R.-L. (1961). La Catalogne. *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 15 (3), 419-429. <https://doi.org/10.7202/302137ar>

Map of the Provinces of France in 1789²



How did they make the catalogue? Reusing and the no-waste movement are not a modern creation you know. Our very own ancestors were masters in saving every single item and giving it a new life and purpose for the benefit of the family. Almost every family had its loom and spinning wheel. Therefore, catalogues were woven with pieces of old garments and cotton warp of any type of fabrics that they could repurpose. The basic needs were a pound of cotton and five pounds of old fabrics. Linen thread was also used whenever the fabric was more rough, otherwise, it was cotton. They would rip apart the old fabric in slices of about one-half to an inch wide and stitch them together end-to-end. This blanket is well known for being sturdy, for its longevity and for being very warm which were three fundamental needs of a French-Canadian family. Heaviness is also a characteristic. Because my grandmother's loom was only a 45-inch, she made two catalogue blankets that she sewed together in the middle. My blanket weighs eight pounds! It's the best, I'm telling you, no need for those modern weighted blankets.



Mme Jeanne d'Arc Bouchard
Sitting at Her Loom
Photo courtesy of Gervais Gilbert

² By Paul Vidal de La Blache (1845-1918) - [1], Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=77398823>

I remember sitting on the loom bench beside my grandmother, her name was Jeanne d'Arc Bouchard (1927-2016), and observing her ability to work her loom. It seemed so easy and I enjoyed the soft sound made by the moving mechanism. She had two looms in the upstairs bedroom. One was hers, (a 45-inch), and the other one, (a 60-inch), the biggest loom size that could be operated by a single weaver, that is pictured on the cover of this article, and which was her sister Blanche's, who lived nearby. To me, the loom looked a bit like an organ mainly because of its imposing size and pedalboard. Grand-maman would craft so many wonderful pieces on her loom. She made tablecloths, placemats, hand towels, blankets and rugs.



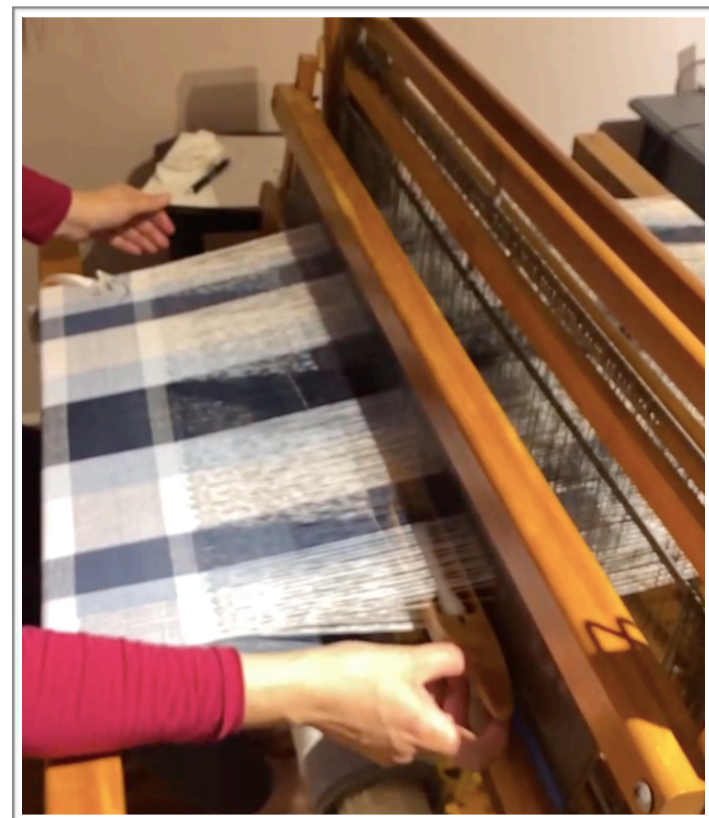
Catalogne Blanket (Upper Left) and More Woven Blankets Made
by Mme Jeanne d'Arc Bouchard
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

Then I wondered, how did my grandmother learn how to weave? I asked my mother Lou and her brother Guy for their memories of it. They told me that grand-maman had learned from her own mother how to weave, sew, knit and crochet. Her loom and spinning wheel came from her mother-in-law who taught her more. Grand-papa would help her spin the wool and untangle the threads. Then in probably the 1960s and onward, she joined the *Cercle des Fermières*. This association brought housewives together and out of their homes. There, they could exchange, have their own voices, and even go public with their concerns. They would help preserve the cultural heritage of Quebec through arts and crafts, cooking, etc.³ The Cercle des Fermières is still in existence today. I am sure that these associations helped my grand-maman throughout

³ www.cfq.qc.ca

her life as she would tell us often about it. She became a widow early on in her life and she told me that being a part of these groups helped her go through a difficult mourning period. They really helped generations of women that needed to get out of their house / family routine.

My cousin is a member of the cercle where she lives in St-Sauveur, Quebec. She showed me her looms, their parts and how to weave.



Woman Weaving on a 36-inch Loom
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

Here are some pictures of two of her looms; one is a traditional one and the second is a table loom with the pedalboard being operated from above (to the right).

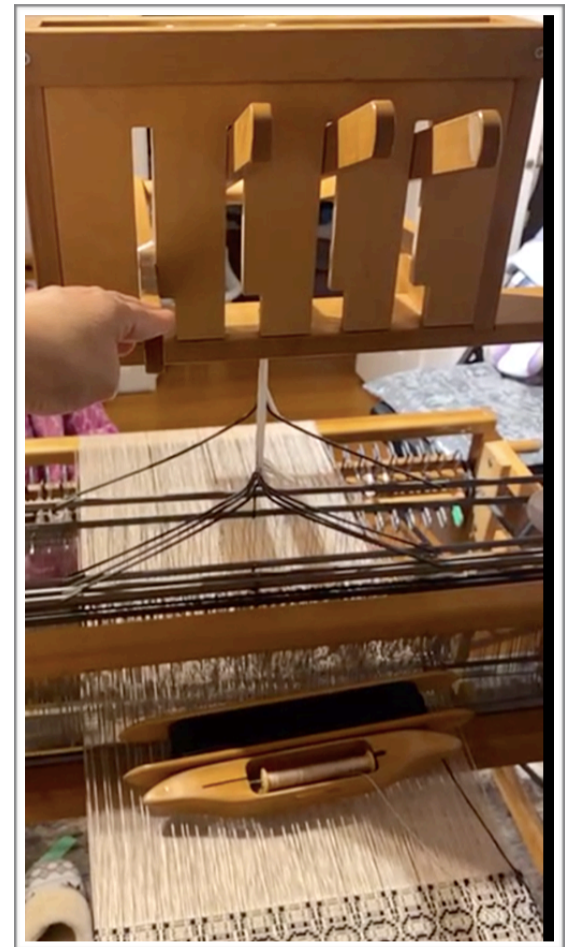


Table Loom
Photo courtesy of Caroline Meilleur

For more information on the history of woven textiles in Canada, I highly recommend the article, by the same name, from the Canadian Encyclopedia available online at: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/woven-textiles>. To learn more about the occupation of weaver, take the time to read the French-Canadian Genealogist's article at: <https://www.tfcg.ca/old-occupation-weaver>.



Article Extra - Recipe

Tourbillons à l'Érable

When spring is around the corner in Québec, it means that it is or it will be soon “le temps des sucres” or maple sugar making time! I thought of sharing a maple dessert recipe with all of you. In French, we call that dessert “Tourbillons à l'Érable” or Maple Swirls. Super easy and fun.

Tourbillons à l'Érable

Recipe courtesy of Nicole Meilleur

Ingredients

- 16 fl oz of heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups of brown sugar
- ½ cup of maple syrup
- 1 container of crescent dough rolls

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together the whipping cream, brown sugar and maple syrup.
3. Open the crescent roll package, but keep it in a roll. Cut 9 slices about an 1" to 1 1/2" wide and place in a Pyrex baking dish.
4. Pour the cream/sugar/syrup mix around the cut rolls.
5. Bake in oven for 45 minutes.

Note: For a more decadent dessert, add a scoop or two of vanilla ice cream or pour a little bit of heavy whipping cream on top.

