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Mission: To foster a greater understanding of the rich history and heritage of French-speaking people who helped form what is now Minnesota.

Vision: To preserve, advance, and celebrate French-American heritage and culture.

Board of Directors – Biographies

Katie Byboth

Raised amongst the woods and riverways of the St. Croix River Valley, Katie Byboth was always fascinated by stories of the French fur traders and voyageurs who traveled the St. Croix River and Upper Midwest. Later, as an adult, Katie moved to Somerset, Wisconsin, which was founded by French-Canadian settlers in 1850 and where French was the primary language spoken until the 1940s-1950s.

History and its preservation have always been important to Katie, and as a founding member of the new nonprofit the Somerset Champions Council, she and the group are committed to celebrating Somerset's French-Canadian heritage throughout the community through events, activities and more. Also a budding genealogist, Katie is a member of several historical and genealogical societies. She is currently researching her own family tree, as well as those of Somerset's founding families, and is embarking on a community oral history project as a volunteer for the Friends of the Somerset Public Library, and for the Scott History and Genealogy Center. Katie is very excited and proud to have joined FAHF's board and is greatly looking forward to working with and learning from such a wonderful group passionate about French-American history, culture, and heritage.

Gregory D. Cash

Greg Cash is an executive in the medical device industry with over 40 years of business experience and has been chief executive officer of several companies, both public and privately held, as well as running global business units of larger companies. Greg is currently president and CEO of Argent International, a life sciences consulting firm he founded.

Greg is of French and French-Canadian descent. One of his ancestors, Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, was a coureur des bois (fur trader) as well as one of the first two documented non-Native Americans in Minnesota along with Pierre-Esprit Radisson. Greg is a staff member of the Voyageurs program at Concordia Language Villages, which is focused on teaching about the French fur trade in Minnesota as well as the French language.

Greg has lived and worked as an expatriate in London, England, Hong Kong, Paris, France, and Milan, Italy, and he speaks French, German, and Italian. He is a member of the Concordia Language Villages National Advisory Council and the University of Minnesota Office for Technology Commercialization Advisory Board, as well as a board member and treasurer of the Haiti Medical Mission of Wisconsin and Our Lady of Peace Hospice. He holds a BA in international marketing and business administration from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he is an active alumnus presently serving as a mentor to students and on the Opus College of Business Board of Governors. Greg is currently living in suburban Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Laurence Côté-Cournoyer

Laurence Côté-Cournoyer is a Québécoise, from a small town on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River called La Pocatière. She has a BA in classical studies and an advanced degree in museum studies. With 10 years of experience in different museums in Québec, she moved to Minneapolis in 2016. She learned about the French heritage of the state while working at Historic Fort Snelling. To her surprise, she discovered she wasn't the first Cournoyer to move to the area. Four of her paternal ancestors (two sets of brothers) moved from Berthier, to Minnesota, in the 1840s.

Claude Cournoyer bought supplies from the sutler's store at Fort Snelling in 1849. He also served as a grand juror on the First District Court of Mendota, in 1853, with Henry Sibley. Jean-Baptiste Cournoyer married Josephine, a daughter of Abraham Perry, one of the first residents of St. Paul. George Cournoyer helped build the first house in Anoka County. Augustin Cournoyer married Emilie Pepin, the daughter of the Indian Agency's blacksmith. All four Cournoyers can be found in Henry Sibley's traders' ledgers.

Prior to returning to Québec, in April 2022, and now residing in Montréal, Laurence was the supervisor at Sibley Historic Site. She is currently employed by Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, where she supervises the team of educators. Through her work and personal connections, she remains very enthusiastic about promoting French-Canadian heritage in Minnesota.

Dustin DuFault

Dustin hails from the far reaches of northwestern Minnesota wherein both sides of his family can trace their roots to the outskirts of Montreal before immigrating to the United States in the late part of the 19th century. Dustin maintains a solo law practice in downtown Minneapolis wherein he specializes in intellectual property law. Dustin resides in Minnetonka with his wife, Carolina, who is an elementary teacher. Dustin has hopes to one day improve his French speaking skills, which, at the moment, are in need of a little help.

Jenny Hambleton

Jennifer Hambleton is a dynamic healthcare collaboration expert and currently manages partnerships with healthcare nonprofits at an AI HealthTech startup, Array Insights. She has federal and state government work experience, first managing health disability cases at the Social Security Administration and then overseeing a grants portfolio at the Colorado Department of Education. She also pursued an M.P.A. at the University of Colorado - Denver and after graduating with an emphasis in Non-Profit Administration, Jenny moved on to the Be The Match Foundation, where she managed strategic philanthropic alliances through large collaborations with tech and pharma industry partners. Jennifer excels in bridging the gap between cutting-edge technology and meaningful partnership impact. She is passionate about elevating the voice of the patient and disrupting the healthcare system. Jenny became interested in her genealogy after moving back to Minnesota in 2018 and spending more time with her grandparents - one of her favorite things to do! She is proud to be a Dayton French through her grandma, Marlene Ward (Guimont), and enjoys learning about the French history and influence in Minnesota.

Pierre Girard

Pierre's grandparents immigrated to Wisconsin from the Trois-Rivières area of Québec. He was raised in an ethnic home and appreciates his heritage. Through his involvement with La Société Canadienne Française, Les Canadiens Errants, and trips to Canada and France, he has thoroughly explored that heritage. Now in retirement, he is a volunteer at the Minneapolis City Hall where he gives building tours and plays concerts on the City Hall Tower chimes. Pierre also serves on the Minneapolis/Tours (France) Sister Cities Board of Directors.

Mark Labine

Mark graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1977 and received a J.D. from Hamline University School of Law in 1980. He practiced law and worked part time as a contract administrative law judge, arbitrator, magistrate, referee and mediator until June 2005, when he was then appointed to be court referee for Hennepin County District Court.

Mark has served on the board of directors of: Ramsey County Bar Association; Midway YMCA; St. Anthony Park Business Association, (president); Minnesota Association of Mediators, (president); Conflict Resolution Minnesota; Tareyton Condo Association, (president); the St. Mary's Men's Club, (treasurer); the West Side Voice newspaper; and the Hamline Law Alumni Association. He served on the Parks Commission and Finance Committee for the City of Arden Hills, and was a member of the District 12 Community Council for the City of Saint Paul.

Mark has taken a keen interest in his French-Canadian ancestry and genealogy. He served as president of La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota, from 1988 to 1990, and has written a number of books on his family history and ancestors. His latest book, "Ancestral Pathways," documents over 1,700 of his ancestors, including many ancestral lines that go back to France.

Donald Marier

Donald Marier has been interested in his French-Canadian family history for over 40 years. He has helped develop an extensive genealogy database covering his Marier, Bernier, Dupre, and Trudeau heritage as well as many other family lines.

Don has been a member of La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota, La Société Canadienne-Française du St. Cloud, and he served a term as board member of Alliance Française Mpls/St Paul.

Don's interest is in preserving local French-Canadian family history. He grew up in Hugo, Minnesota, and, in 2015, he helped organize The Family History Group. Its purpose is to bring together people from the Centerville, Forest Lake, Hugo, and White Bear Lake area to share family stories, photos, and genealogy. Participants often share memories from their families and several have presented complete family history books they have written. Others are photographing and documenting the St. Genevieve Cemetery in Centerville and the St. John the Baptist Cemetery in Hugo.

H. Jean McFarlane

H. Jean McFarlane, (né Collette), is from Park Rapids, Minnesota. As a result of growing up on a dairy farm, she is no stranger to hard work. At the young age of 12, Jean was unexpectedly introduced to the rigors of agricultural management when her step-father grew ill. She became responsible for all facets of the business, including tending the large garden, feeding the livestock, milking the cows, and even acquiring hog-butcher skills. Seeking greener pastures, she moved to the Twin Cities after completing high school.

Having taken just a few classes at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Jean is essentially a self-taught artist. She enjoys the beauty of our planet, loves being able to paint what she sees and then sharing her artwork with others. In 2018, Jean was commissioned by the French-American Heritage Foundation to paint 24 original watercolor illustrations depicting French heritage sites located throughout Minnesota, for a new brochure that was being developed. After concluding her work for that segment of the project, Jean generously gifted an additional painting, of St. Anthony Falls, to FAHF, which is showcased on the front cover of the brochure.

Caroline Meilleur

Caroline is from Kiamika, Québec, Canada, a municipality in the Laurentides region. She is fluent in French and English, and also speaks Spanish (at an intermediate level). Since 2013, she has lived in Minnesota with

her husband and two children. In addition to receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of Québec in Montréal, (UQAM), in business administration with a profile in tourism and hotel management, Caroline's education includes license and master studies, for a year, at Université de Toulouse II - Le Mirail, in Toulouse, (UTM), Midi-Pyrénées, France. She has more than 18 years of experience in five-star hotel management, in Québec, such as: Fairmont Tremblant (Mont-Tremblant); Club Intrawest Tremblant (Mont-Tremblant); and, Hilton Lac-Leamy (Gatineau).

Also representative of Caroline's professional background are: being a pre-K teaching assistant at L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion (St Paul Public Schools) since 2021; volunteering since 2017 at the Minnesota Genealogical Society's William J. Hoffman Library; and being the research chair and speaker for the Canadian Interest Group of the Minnesota Genealogical Society since 2018, as well as being a member of CIG since 2016. In her spare time, Caroline is a genealogy researcher specializing in French-Canadian genealogy and that of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States. She also provides English translations of old French documents including vital records, notarized contracts, and more.

Mark Petty

Mark previously worked for 25 years as an attorney editor at Thomson Reuters and is a volunteer translator for The Advocates for Human Rights. He received the 2014 volunteer award from The Advocates for Human Rights. He is a member of Epsilon Sigma Alpha, a nonprofit service organization. He studied French, Spanish and mathematics at the University of North Dakota and law at the University of North Dakota School of Law.

Michele Pierce

Michele's last name is an Anglicized version of the French surname Pérusse; specifically, why her great-great-grandfather revised the surname remains unknown to her family. Building upon some genealogy information compiled by her father over 45 years ago, she recently discovered a further wealth of French and French-Canadian ancestors; most surprisingly, she learned that one forefather was from Fribourg, Switzerland, and another one was from Lisbon, Portugal. Michele has an interest in locating biographical details of her ancestors, as well as learning about what was taking place in history at the time the families left France and why they immigrated to Nouvelle France, and then to the United States.

Michele is a graduate of the University of Minnesota. Her professional background includes the areas of marketing, printing, publications, and interacting with state insurance regulatory agencies throughout the country regarding continuing education compliance requirements.

Michael Rainville, Sr.

Michael is a 5th generation member of the Rainville family that emigrated from Québec City to Minneapolis, in 1860, to work in the sawmills located along St. Anthony Falls. An earlier branch of the Rainville family emigrated from Québec City to western Minnesota in the 1780s to establish a fur trading post (Fort Renville) on Lac Qui Parle. Founder of this early fur trading post, Joseph Rainville changed the spelling from Rainville to Renville to make the name easier to read. Renville County is named after Joseph Renville. Michael's great-great-grandmother Sophia and great-great-grandfather Edward were part of the French-Canadian immigrants who founded Our Lady of Lourdes Church in 1877. Today, he continues his family involvement in the Church by serving as the parish council chairman.

Michael graduated from De La Salle High School, and the University of St. Thomas, and he has a certification in nonprofit management from Notre Dame University. His volunteer work includes redevelopment of the Ritz Theater, the Pierre Bottineau Library at the Grain Belt Brewery, and the citizens' effort to establish the riverfront parks of BF Nelson, Graco and the Sheridan Memorial. Michael worked for the Minneapolis

Convention and Visitors Association for 35 years and now serves as 3rd Ward City Council member for the City of Minneapolis. He is a very proud member of the French-American Heritage Foundation.

Patricia Ruffing

Pat was born in northern Minnesota and her mother proudly sent her to the boarding high school, St. Joseph's Academy, in Crookston, staffed by the sisters of St. Joseph of Bourg, France. Many of them came from French-Canadian families in Red Lake County, Minnesota, as did her mother.

After earning a BA in history education from Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and several years of teaching, Pat earned a certificate of social work from the University of Minnesota, and worked at Ramsey County, in St. Paul, as a social worker for 40 years.

In retirement, she is active in the Maple Grove Historical Museum and is editor of the quarterly newsletter for the MGHPS. Maple Grove lies within an area in northwestern Hennepin County that was originally settled by French-Canadian families.

Jane Skinner Peck

Though not French by blood, Jane is French by experience. Living in France at the age of 19, she has returned many times for further study, absorbing the language and culture into her life and work. As a dance historian, choreographer, and professor of dance Jane has visited, researched and performed the dances and stories of many French cultures: 18th century Versailles, Québec, Red River Métis, Haiti, and West Africa. She directs her company, Dance Revels Moving History, in many of these performances and workshops, with annual performances at Prairie du Chien Villa Louis and Sibley Historic Site in Mendota. She was adjunct professor at Winona State University Department of Theater and Dance and is now founder and director of History Alive Lanesboro, a history theater company for which she is both playwright and director.

Marie Trépanier

Because her French-speaking grandmother lived with her family when Marie was eleven years old, her interest has been piqued regarding the French-Canadian roots on the Trépanier side of the family.

Now, as a retired nurse, she has embarked on pursuing family genealogical mysteries and visiting places of ancestral origins. Our region has a treasure trove of history, culture, architecture, and language brought here by the early French Canadians that we must never forget. Marie would like to help keep our history alive.

John Ward

John graduated from St. John's University in Collegeville in 1984 and received a J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law in 1988. He also has a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from the University of Minnesota in 2014. He practiced law but then changed careers and entered education.

His early career was spent at St. Louis Park High School. He then went on to work at Mounds View Public Schools as an administrator for 25 years, retiring as an associate superintendent. John now works with the Minnesota School Board Association assisting in a variety of ways but most prominently in superintendent searches. John is a senior fellow at the Center for Policy Design and has served on the board of directors of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.

John is very interested in his French-Canadian ancestry and genealogy. His mother is a full descendent of French Canada and grew up in the French community in Dayton, Minnesota, one of the "Dayton French." He is very interested in preserving the knowledge of the legacy the French had in the formation of the state as well as all things French in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest.

MaryEllen Weller

MaryEllen has taught French and Spanish at Apple Valley High School and Mesabi Range Community College. She has authored a biography, *Frances Anne Hopkins: Hudson's Bay Company Wife, Voyageurs' Artist*, and is passionate about family history and genealogy (for the grandchildren!), and all things French American.

Kathy Whelpley

Kathy was raised in Minnetonka, MN, and has spent most of her adult years living in different areas of the United States. Due to a number of relocations, she has had a variety of jobs, including working at a garden nursery center, as a florist, as an insurance underwriter, and, as an administrative assistant, to name a few. Upon retirement, she moved back to St. Paul, MN.

Since 1975, Kathy has been interested in genealogy. Although she is primarily of Scandinavian and Polish descent, she may one day find a French connection!