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

Dick Bernard

Dick has been very actively engaged in French-Canadian family history for over 40 years and has been very active in Midwest French-Canadian heritage efforts during the same time period. His work included editing a newsletter, Chez Nous, from 1985 through 2001, for La Société Canadienne-Française du Minnesota (LSCF). The entire Chez Nous collection is indexed and can be found on the French-American Heritage Foundation website, fahfminn.org, under the “Library” tab. He was part of the committee that put together the 2012 Franco-Fête in Minneapolis, and in 1995 he coordinated a major Franco-American cultural event in the Twin Cities. He is a past president and was a long-time member of LSCF. He grew up in North Dakota, completing college there. His father is 100% French Canadian from a family whose first ancestor in Quebec arrived in 1618, and perhaps earlier. He was a teacher and for the last 27 years of his work career he had represented teachers through the Minnesota Education Association (now Education Minnesota). Dick has long been an author. Visit his website, www.chez-nous.net/, where you may enjoy reading many of his articles.

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. He is also board chair of PetVivo Holdings, and an independent director of i-Lumen Scientific.

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. Through her work and personal connections, she remains very enthusiastic about promoting French-Canadian heritage in Minnesota.

Mark Dillon

Mark is FAHF’s board secretary. His heritage is primarily Polish and Slovak from the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. A history buff, Mark enlisted with FAHF on the 100th anniversary of the mustering of the Polish Army in France. He has a MS in journalism from Northwestern University and a BA in communications from Fordham University. Mark is Minnesota Bureau Chief for the Polish American Journal newspaper. He is also First Vice President of the American Council for Polish Culture.

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.

Jerry Foley

In his retirement years, Jerry has been an avid student of Canadian history and genealogy. He authored Minnesota, eh! A Foley/Perras Family History. With a Canadian cousin, he created a genealogy of the family of George Fallu, his great-great-grandfather and the first mayor of Nouvelle, Québec. A copy of Jerry’s book, printed in its entirety, is located on the French-American Heritage Foundation website: fahfminn.org. Go to the “Library” tab and click on “Books” to access the Foley/Fallu/Falleau family history book.

Pierre Girard

Pierre’s grandparents immigrated to Wisconsin from the Trois-Rivières area of Quebec. 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, (née 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 butchering 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 is an attorney editor at Thomson Reuters and 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 40 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 a 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 researched and performed the dances and cultures 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 teaches workshops across the Midwest. She has been adjunct professor at Winona State University Department of Theater and Dance since 2011.

**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 fellow and co-coordinator of the Minnesota Education Policy Fellowship through 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 looking to expand the history of those settlers in Dayton and chronicle their story as well as supporting all things in Minnesota of French ancestry. While he had three semesters of French during college, his command of the language is a constant growth area for him.

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.