Explaining the absence and the characteristics of the migrants: French Canadians in southwestern Saskatchewan at the turn of the 20th Century

Beckey Hamilton
University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
beckey.hamilton@gmail.com

Abstract

The conspicuous lack of Francophone settlement in western Canada remains a persistent mystery in Canadian history and has influenced the region’s population geography. Political and cultural explanations have predominated. Quebec’s and New England’s elite characterized the region negatively while government policies apparently favoured other nationalities. Linguistic and educational disadvantages also seemed to influence the direction of Francophone moves towards New England. Although it is clear that French Canadians flocked to New England by the thousands while relatively few moved to the prairies and that this limited the development of chain migration, there is room to add to previous explanations of this pattern of movement. While the west was negatively portrayed, the elite described New England similarly. Other studies have shown that processes behind French Canadian migration to New England led to the selection of a particular group of Québécois. This study uses a systems approach and shows the interplay between structural, and individual factors and other links that contributed to this movement. This also provides a parallel to studies that have examined the various factors that contributed to a selection of people who would move in particular directions, in this case to southwestern Saskatchewan. This also allows a comparison with Francophones who migrated to New England and furthers understanding of the various factors that influenced the Francophone frontier in western Canada.

Keywords: Francophones, history, prairies, migration, settlement

Migration Basis

A systems approach is one way of viewing clustered migration (Hoerder 1999, 6). This perspective offers a way to link the large scale structures of the political economy with micro-scale characteristics of migrants (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992), in a way that gives particulars about migration as one response among many potential responses to change within particular contexts (Harris and Moore 1980, 28; Widdis 1988, 272-273). The systems approach also provides reasons why particular destinations were chosen by migrants (Fawcett 1989, 672).

Mabogunje (1970) established the use of this approach in the study of migration. He emphasized links between origins and destinations and factors in both areas that influenced the development of migration channels. Later researchers developed his idea. The systems approach to migration thus considers migration as being influenced by:

(1) Macro-scale factors: broad scale socio-economic forces along with local social forces (e.g., local social constraints on migration) affecting the sending and destination locations;

(2) Meso-scale factors: links between localities that influence migration, including family and group influence and strength, immigration and emigration policies; advertising, assistance provided to emigrants, and communications from migrants about the situation in their new home;

(3) Micro-scale factors: individual characteristics/individual human capital that influences propensity to migrate and mental

1 Cooke and Bélanger (2006) provide one example of analysis of a migration flow using a systems approach.

For Kritz and Zlotnik (1992) and Gurak and Caces (1992) meso-scale factors, or the links, emerged at the forefront in influencing migration patterns. Although the initial moves that led to the development of migration systems were made for various reasons, including structural reasons, the migrant networks that formed (classified as a meso-scale factor), led to the perpetuation of migration, influenced the selection of migrants, and contributed to the persistence of the system for a period after the reasons for the system’s establishment had changed.

This view of migration systems was used to examine the current data on French Canadian migration to southwestern Saskatchewan. It allows an intersection of approaches that, if considered together, have recognized the importance of multiple factors in migration, particularly in its distance, direction and participants. More specifically this approach intersects generally macro scale factors that were elucidated by early writers; namely distance (Christian and Braden 1966), alternate opportune locations (Stouffer 1940) and broad scale economic forces (Ravenstein 1885; Lee 1966) with other forces that were stressed by later scholars who critiqued their predecessors as describing migration in terms of “a mechanical response to an overarching economic rationality” (White and Woods 1980, 7). Thus some stress individual, micro scale factors in migration, examining, for instance, propensity to move at different stages in the life cycle (for example, Ravenstein 1885; Leslie and Richardson 1961). Other particular, personal characteristics were considered by Bennett and Kohl (1995) when they examined those who left the North American western frontier. On the other hand the development of ideas of place utility (Wolpert 1965) underscored the importance of perception of gains in initial and a variety of alternate locations in the decision to move. Streams of information about potential new places were crucial in the development of utilities assigned to each place. Numerous studies have shown the crucial role of links between places in migration patterns. For instance, Hudson (1976) demonstrated that westward movement in the United States occurred along “information-migration networks.” Chain migration, based on links between family, friends, acquaintances and those of more general common background has been well shown to have been important in ethnic migration and the formation of bloc settlements (for example Richtik 1986; Ostergren 1998; Lehr 1999).

Thus numerous studies have viewed migration as highly complex. They have suggested the need to consider the interplay between large scale economic structures, place utilities as they were mediated by culture along with individual, micro scale characteristics; at times this can be described as viewing migration in context (Harris and Moore 1980; Ramirez 1991a, 244; Moon 1995). The use of a technique that considers migration at various, macro and micro scales and that shows how links develop between places that affect perceptions and possibilities of places and decisions relative to movement by particular individuals, from particular places and to particular places, allows this.

Previous Work on French Canadian Migration to the Canadian Prairies

Despite a few early works on Francophone migration that included some information on the move west, such as that by Rimbert (1954) in the early 1960s, little was known about this very extensive emigration (Faucher 1961). Moreover, Rimbert’s work dealt mostly with the distribution of French Canadians in the United States, but gave a few comments about their emigration, including some about the limitedness of Francophone migration to western Canada. Interest increased after this, with some statistical work on French Canadian emigration and some study of the general causes of the move (Faucher 1964, 1975; Paquet, 1964; Lavoie 1981; Roby 1982).

While Rumilly (1961) and Rimbert (1954) contended that the Dominion Government had sought to limit Francophone migration to western Canada through high rail fares and the United Empire Settlement Act, Silver (1966, 1969) and Lalonde (1979) suggested that it was Quebec’s elite and culture that did not promote mobility and the creation of frontiersmen that limited French Canadian migration to the Canadian west. These assertions too were later questioned. First, it was suggested that French Canadian society was geographically mobile rather than stationary. Mobility was essential to ensure family survival. The image of stability and efforts to promote it were constructed by the elite and had little to do with the social and economic reality of most French Canadians (Morissonneau 1979; Lalonde 1979, 184-185; Ramirez 1991a, 245-246; Lamarre 1998). Painchaud (1987) has written on the involvement of other clerics in French Canadian mobility, these being the western clerics and their attempts to promote movement to the west. Others have studied the role of economics and human capital in the direction of this migration; limited education, little knowledge of English, and large families made the move west uneconomical (Green, MacKinon, and Minns, 2005).

Other more detailed studies of specific migration patterns have been conducted following Vicero’s (1968, 217-218) and Allen’s (1972) work that showed that French Canadian migrants to specific places in the United States also came from particular common places. Thus, Ennis (1977) provided an overview of the broad factors that attracted various groups of Francophones to western Canada and suggested that the family was important in the move and in settlement. Sylvester (1997, 25) showed that many Francophones who settled at Montcalm, Manitoba had common origins, though he did not specifically study migration patterns. Painchaud (1969) included population statistics in his thesis on repatriation to Manitoba. Yet this portion of his study sought to compare different groups of French Canadians; those from Quebec, repatriates and those from elsewhere in Canada, rather than specifically considering demographics as one micro-scale factor in the selection of migrants. At the same time, he suggested a need for further study of the economic background of French Canadian migrants.
The Present Study

This study considers French Canadian migration to the Canadian prairies using a systems approach. The broad structures and the meso-scale links of this migration have been generally described elsewhere (e.g., Tessier 1974; Ennis 1977; Hamilton 2007); but they are brought together and summarized here. On the other hand, the present study focuses on some of the particular characteristics of the individuals involved in the move. Thus, it examines how the broad structures and the meso-scale links selected particular individuals for migration to this region (White and Woods 1980, 12). More specifically, it considers:

1. Whether French Canadian migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan shared particular characteristics that would suggest that they were “selected” from the larger Quebec population.

2. Whether these French Canadians differed from Québécois who opted to move in other directions.

3. Whether these French Canadians resembled other settlers of the Canadian prairie frontier.

Moreover, by specifically studying the characteristics of French Canadians involved in migration, this work parallels that of Ramirez (1991b), Frénette (1995) and Takai (2001), who have shown that French Canadians who migrated to the United States, to new colonization areas in Quebec, and those who repatriated from the United States had particular micro-scale (individual) characteristics. Their particular characteristics, within the socio-economic context of their home area, and in that of the receiving area, made it beneficial to migrate and to migrate in specific directions. In this regard, Ramirez (1991b) and Takai (2001) refer to a “selection mechanism” that “chose” migrants for particular locales if they had the characteristics and skills that best met the needs of that locale at a particular time. In the same way, it is suggested here, micro-scale individual characteristics, in conjunction with the particularities of the macro-scale contexts involved, and the meso-scale networks, may have led to a selection of migrants for the west, who may have differed from those who were selected for New England.

Finally, the study extends the author’s previous work on Francophone settlement. The current study uses a larger group of Francophones, from several communities in southwestern Saskatchewan. The larger group was used for two reasons: first, to attain larger samples, especially of those who had owned land in Quebec and second, to diminish the potential of the appearance of particular demographic and economic backgrounds appearing as the result of recruitment for particular communities.

Study Area and Time Period

This work used two study areas; a general area for general study and a smaller area for more detailed study (Figure 1). The general study area approximates southwestern Saskatchewan’s Francophone belt (Lapointe and Tessier 1986, 116). More particularly, the general study area consists of the census areas that cover this Francophone settlement region. Smaller areas were also selected for more detailed study, using homestead files; these areas encompass seven bloc settlements within the Francophone region of southwestern Saskatchewan. The bloc settlements formed the core areas of Francophone settlement in the larger region (Fung 1999). The time needed to consult homestead files is the main reason for the use of two study areas.

The time period consists of the early 1900s. This was the time period in which most of this region was settled. Settlement began earlier in the Willow Bunch area (Rondeau 1923). Only those French Canadians who were still present in the area in the early 1900s were included in the analysis.

Source Material

Manuscript censuses, homestead files and local histories form the main source material for this study. All sources have been used elsewhere in studies of migration and settlement. Manuscript censuses provided general information on the origins of settlers and gave details about demographic characteristics. This source is fairly accurate but not error free as it may be subject to transcription errors and to under-enumeration (Gallenson and Levy 1986). The homestead files also provided general and on occasion detailed information about homesteaders’ origins. Some information about families is also included in the homestead files but this is often erroneous (Rodwell 1965, 12). Local histories, on the other hand, provided more details about migrants’ origins. Assessments of the quality of this source have
suggested that it is variable and depends on the specific history (Widdis 1992, 263-264).

**Study Group and Identification of Settlers**

The whole study group consists of 1,820 Francophones who were identified in the 1911 census and with the homestead files. Two subsets of Francophones were used for detailed study. The first includes 870 Francophone household heads and their families who were identified in the 1911 manuscript census. Detailed demographic study was conducted on these Francophones and their families since the census provided detailed information on them, especially on their, their spouse’s and their children’s ages. This information was not available for Francophones who were only identified in the homestead files. The second subset was used for detailed study of the economic background of the migrants. This subset was created of Francophones who were located to their previous homes in Quebec. First and family names, age and the presence of other family members were used to identify these Francophones as the same people who settled in the study area. This subset of Francophones consists of 77 landowners and 227 landowners’ sons. Although the goal was to locate as many Francophones in Quebec as possible, and to create as large of a dataset as possible, many who settled in the study area could not be located in Quebec. In some cases, there was insufficient information to ensure accurate identification. In other instances, migrants may have been in the United States in 1901. Finally, difficulties in matching census, such as differences in spelling, may have affected identification. Although these difficulties and the few Francophones who were located may have biased the results this could not be avoided.

Confirming that settlers were French Canadian was another issue. Various sources were used to determine which settlers in southwestern Saskatchewan fit this category. The 1911 manuscript census included population origins. Other Francophones, who homesteaded, but who were not enumerated in the 1911 census (i.e., those who were identified solely from the homestead files), were identified through tracing to their/their families’ origins to Quebec. Métis people, who frequently had Francophone names and who were described in the 1911 census as Francophone were not included in this study. Métis people were separated from Francophones using the 1901 manuscript census, which distinguished them from Francophones, parish records and Métis scrip files.

**Results**

**Macro-Scale Factors**

By the turn of the 20th Century, economic and demographic forces had spurred extensive emigration from Quebec for more than half a century. Although emigration from France to Quebec largely ceased following the Treaty of Paris (1763), which placed Quebec under British rule, the Catholic church promoted a maintenance of culture and the growth of French Canada through large families (the “revanche des berceaux”) (Bone 2008, 264). With the average French Canadian couple having 6.7 children, several of whom became inheritors of their parents’ seigneurial land, queue’s seigneuries became overcrowded (Harris 1966, 131-132; Saint-Yves 1982, 68; Young and Dickinson 1988, 109).

Extensions of seigneurial landholdings into the Richelieu, Chaudière and Yamaska accommodated the population for a period, but further expansions were limited by Quebec’s physical environment and by institutions in new settlement areas. The Saint Lawrence Lowlands, an area covered with sandy-clay soil, left by former glacial seas, contains the land that is best suited to farming. Land with suitable relief is limited elsewhere, to pockets of level clay land in the shield and to level terrain in the Appalachians. Soils in most areas are thin, acidic podzols and ill suited to farming. The climate is also limiting. The subarctic climate zone, characterized by long cold winters and a short warm summer season extends through most of the province. The warmer Great-Lakes-St Lawrence climate zone is only found in the southwestern part of Quebec. Thus, the growing season is short through much of the province (Vicero 1968, 15; Bone 2008, 44; 52-56). Land granting and settlement regulations in new settlement areas of the Eastern Townships and the North also hindered Quebec farmers. In these regions they encountered limited transportation, tremendous distances to markets, regulations that made the take up of forest lots difficult, restrictions on sale of timber (which often provided vital income), and company pricing for produce and goods that kept them at a subsistence level (Ramirez 1991b, 77-80).

Farming practices, too, contributed to degradation of the land resource. Cropping patterns in Quebec traditionally involved a two year rotation. Fertilizing had, for generations, been minimal; Québécois farmers were known to dump manure in the Saint Lawrence. Although fertilizer and further rotations were increasingly used by the turn of the 20th Century, both improvements were mostly made by the larger farmers while those with smaller farms lacked the land and resources to modify their practices (Jones 1969, 115-116; Ramirez and Otis 2001, 14-15).

The development of a wheat export economy in the Midwest, Ontario, and the western states by the 1870s heightened the difficulties that Quebec’s rural population faced. The new regions’ fertile soils and developing transportation systems enhanced their competitiveness. Québécois farmers soon faced a need to change their production to remain competitive. Livestock farming that could be conducted profitably despite Quebec’s relatively limited land resources demanded larger farms. Purchasing additional land was possible for those who owned the larger farms, but this was difficult and even impossible for small farmers. In addition to lacking the finances needed to acquire more land, small farmers faced difficulties obtaining loans to make these purchases. Banks were few in Quebec and they

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5 Lamarre (1998) used a similar technique despite the potential of error.

6 Inheritance patterns in Quebec involved multiple heirs.
tended to lend only to the elite. (Ennis 1977, 140; Roby 1982, 12; Armstrong, 1984, 80-84; Ramirez and Otis 2001, 14-15)

The result was an abundance of uncompetitive small farmers. This segment of the population was soon forced into either day labour as a journalier – an occupation for which there was less demand on the emerging dairy farms than on grain farms – or into joining the ranks of out-migrants (Ramirez 1991b, 26-29). Indeed, Maisonneuve (1985) found that most migrants during the 1850s were families that owned small farms, rather than individuals, Quebec’s surplus offspring.

But economic change occurred unevenly in Quebec, with “... powerful poles of development [...] accompanied by the marginalization of given geo economic areas.” (Ramirez 1991a, 246). For one, industry expanded and industrial centers emerged. However, these did not provide sufficient employment for French Canadians in search of work (Ramirez 1991a, 246). Elsewhere too, emigration decisions were affected by specific local conditions (Ramirez 1991a, 246). Some of the regional differences in Quebec are evident in Figure 2. It is apparent from the figure that the smallest farms were located in the traditional seigneurial area of the province, and in the most fertile areas. Farms were larger in the Eastern Townships and in new settlement areas of Témiscamingue and the Saguenay. In these regions, farms had not been subject to subdivision for generations. But, at the same time, land and climate conditions were less favourable for agriculture.

Nonetheless, Figure 2 and the r2 value of 0.042634, associating the number of migrants per county with average farm size, demonstrate very little correlation between Francophone migration and counties with very small farms. Thus, it is suggested that while the structural conditions that hindered Québécois farmers played a role in emigration, highly difficult situations alone did not appear to be the selection factor of migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan. At the same time, these observations do not account for the difficulties Québécois farmers with large land holdings, but who were located in an unfavourable area, may have had.

Figures 3 and 4 show the relationship between migrants’ farm sizes and average farm sizes by county. These two figures show that while some migrants arrived from smaller farms than most people in the counties where they lived, many did not. The most extensive differences between the average size of migrants’ or migrants’ sons land holdings and average farm sizes in Quebec counties are found where few migrants came from a particular county (i.e., in these cases a single migrant’s farm heavily influenced the statistics). Still, land owners who migrated to southwestern Saskatchewan came from farms that were on average 141.7% the size of farms in the counties from which they came from while farmers’ sons came from farms that were an average of 166.3% the size of farms in the counties that they moved from. Yet, again, the information on these figures relative to the land base that migrants had in their homes in Quebec is incomplete. For example, while some Francophones may have come from relatively large farms, their land may have been poor. Western Canada, on the other hand, had emerged as a growing region at the turn of the 20th Century. The end of...
Figure 3: Average farm sizes of migrant landowners compared with average farm sizes by county.

Figure 4: Average farm sizes of migrant landowners’ sons compared with average farm sizes by county.
the depression of the late 1800s, the closing of the American settlement frontier, technology breakthroughs in production, and improved transportation were contributory (Norrie 1975). The passing of the National Policy and the Dominion Lands Act had made thousands of acres of fertile lands available for settlement at the low cost of a $10 entry fee. This provided an enormous pull for many potential migrants (McKercher and Wolfe 1986).

Meso-Scale Links

Several links mediated between individual Francophones and the structures of the local and broader economy. These contributed generally to Francophone migration and more particularly to the selection of Francophones who moved. These links, it is suggested, included government and church politics, distance and rail fares, priests, other organizations developed to recruit migrants and family and acquaintance networks. These links correspond, to some degree, to Fawcett’s (1989) conceptualization of linkages between the structural economy and individual migrants.

(1) Government and Church Policy

Government policy relative to settlement of the west represented one of the links between Quebec and the prairies. Shortly after purchasing Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1870, Canada enacted the Dominion Lands Policy. Attempts to attract migrants to the prairie west soon followed. Francophones were among the desirable settlers for the west (Lapointe and Tessier 1986, 74-75), but the Department of the Interior opposed advertising in one province in favour of another (NAC file RG76, vol.382, file 535325 part 1, 1914). These efforts represented one part of the National Policy that aimed at spurring economic growth.

Members of Quebec’s elite criticized Canadian government policies relative to immigration, suggesting that this link could have been stronger. Dominion government attempts to attract British and European settlers, while not assisting French Canadians who desired to move west, appeared as an attempt to weaken the Francophone position within Confederation and aimed at promoting assimilation. Differences between rail fares, especially those instituted under the United Empire Settlement Act were of concern. Accordingly, every French Canadian paid $46.45 to travel to Winnipeg, $86.90 to go as far as Vancouver. At the same time, adults arriving from London paid $22 to travel to Winnipeg and $29.80 to travel to Vancouver while their children travelled free (Rimbert 1954, 82; Rumilly 1961, 15-22). Still, this policy was implemented (in 1925) after much of the study area was settled therefore the applicability Rimbert’s and Rumilly’s contentions to the study area are likely limited.

At the same time, Quebec’s elite opposed efforts to attract French Canadians from Quebec to the west (Silver 1966, 1969; Lalonde 1979). Clerics, politicians and journals made it their objective to dissuade French Canadians from moving west.

(2) Physical Distance and Cost

The building of the CPR, which reached the study area by 1883, much facilitated transportation. Still, rail fares were costly, especially compared to fares to New England. It cost $42.30 to travel from Quebec to Edmonton in 1899, and $46.45 per person to travel to Winnipeg in 1927. On the other hand, Québécois could travel to Maine for $14.40 and young children travelled free. Also, the full cost of settlement involved more than the rail fare; between $300 and $550 was needed to become established on a homestead (Rimbert 1954, 82; Lalonde 1979, 185; Dick 1981; Rouillard 1985, 28).

(3) Recruiters

Priests consistently played a role in Francophone settlement in western Canada (Lapointe and Tessier 1986). From the early to mid-1800s and especially from the 1870s onward, seeing the arrival of Anglophones and not wishing western Canada to be dominated by non-Francophones, Archbishop Taché appointed colonizing priests. The missionary colonizers distributed advertising, toured Quebec, Ontario and Francophone areas of the United States attempting to attract co-nationals to settle in western Canada (Painchaud 1987). Fathers Louis Pierre Gravel, Gaire, Roy and Passaplan were most involved in southwestern Saskatchewan. Father Gravel was the most involved with French Canadians, while Fathers Roy and Passaplan generally focused their efforts on attracting European Francophones and Father Jean Gaire was especially involved in the settlement of southeastern Saskatchewan (SHSB L-41180 to L-41181 1911). Thus, Father Gravel made multiple tours through New England and Quebec in search of recruits (Hamilton 2007).

At the same time, repatriation agents sought to attract Francophones to the Canadian west. While they were to focus their efforts on the United States, some worked in Canada, mostly, they suggested, to intercept potential expatriates. Fathers J.A. Ouéllette and Moise Blais are examples (see Figure 6).

Francophones, too set up a colonization company, La Compagnie Canadienne de Colonisation, to attract homesteaders. The company advertised and had agents in southwestern Saskatchewan to promote the region (Le Patriote de L’Ouest 1916, 1917a, 1917b). Even some Francophones in southwestern Saskatchewan also became involved in the effort. Edmond Gauthier, an early settler at Gravelbourg, who visited friends and family and attracted relatives from Quebec, Cantal and Massachusetts, is an example (Auclair nd, 41).

(4) Media

Western newspapers also attempted to attract French Canadians. Le Patriote de L’Ouest, especially, carried articles promoting Francophone settlement in western Canada (Lalonde 1982). The parish paper of Saint Victor and Willow Bunch and Les Cloches de Saint Boniface furthered the effort (Anonymous 1905; Bulletin Paroissial Willow Bunch et St. Victor 1 April 1916).
On the other hand, the media, particularly that in Quebec included negative portrayals of Quebec, links that would have hindered emigration (Silver 1969).

(5) Family

Studies well acknowledge the historic importance of the extended family in French Canada and its role in migration patterns. In fact, some suggest that studies of French Canadian settlement should give less emphasis to the parish as an attraction and institution involved in settlement, and place more emphasis to the family. Rather than the parish, these studies suggest, it was the presence of extended family that attracted French Canadians to settle together in specific locales across the continent (Morissonneau 1979, 36). Evidence of chain migration is apparent in Figure 5 which shows that many Francophones who settled in southwestern Saskatchewan came from a few counties. This observation could be rendered even more exact. Most Francophones from several of the counties were from a few parishes within the counties. Moreover, it was common for most Francophones who migrated to specific parishes in southwestern Saskatchewan to have come from one or only a few parishes in Quebec. For example, numerous settlers at Willow Bunch and the surrounding region came from St-Gabriel-de-Brandon and L’Acadie, while many who settled at Ferland arrived from St-Claire Dorchester (Anderson 2005, 365). This observation, of chain migration among Francophones, is in common with other ethnic groups who settled on the Canadian prairies.³

(6) Importance of the Links

While some studies stress the importance of recruiters in French Canadian migration (Lalonde and Tessier 1986; Painchau 1976) others have questioned the effectiveness of the recruitment (Hamilton 2007). Further evidence of the limited importance of the recruiters is apparent from a comparison of Figure 6 with the recent residences of Francophone migrants (Figure 7). Relatively few Francophones arrived from the places where clerics most extensively recruited. As Hoerder (1999, 6) points out, this was much in common with other settlers. Emigration often involved the investment of all migrants had in the move. Recruitment brochures that could not be verified were often treated with skepticism. On the other hand, as suggested, family networks were trusted and important.

Spatial Pattern of Migration

The migration pattern combined direct movement from Quebec, movement from one of the colonization frontiers in

Figure 6: Recruitment by Catholic Priests.
Figure 7: Recent residences of Francophone migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan.
Table 1: Age of household head of Francophone migrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (1910)</th>
<th>Migrants to Southwestern Saskatchewan</th>
<th>From Quebec no. (%)</th>
<th>To Wotton Quebec no. (%)</th>
<th>To Lewiston Maine no. (%)</th>
<th>Return from New England</th>
<th>Quebec Population 1911** no. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 15</td>
<td>17 (3.0)</td>
<td>2 (11)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>100,632 (16.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>66 (11.6)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>168,995 (27.2)</td>
<td>125,314 (20.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>211 (37.1)</td>
<td>6 (33)</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
<td>20.6 %</td>
<td>89,726 (14.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>142 (24.9)</td>
<td>6 (33)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>37.9 %</td>
<td>66,335 (10.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>65 (11.4)</td>
<td>3 (17)</td>
<td>7 (39)</td>
<td>26.9 %</td>
<td>70,663 (11.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>43 (7.6)</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
<td>7 (39)</td>
<td>6.3 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 60</td>
<td>25 (4.4)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (17)</td>
<td>1.6 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>621,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>621,665</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>569</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>621,665</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* percent of known
** population to 89 years; percent calculations of population ages 15-89
Sources: 1911 manuscript census, homestead files, local histories, Ramirez 1991b, Frénette 1995

Table 2: Number of children of Francophone migrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Family Heads, 1911</th>
<th>Number of Children in 1911 (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>35-39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>55-59</td>
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<td>60+</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Percent</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Wotton Quebec</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Lewiston Maine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 2.5 children
Source: 1911 manuscript census; Frénette 1995
Ontario, movement from the American frontier and, to a lesser extent, movement from New England. This is apparent in figure 7. Thus, 35% of Francophones arrived directly from Quebec, 5% came from Ontario, 33% came from a prairie province, 7% arrived from a plains state; 4% came from the Mid-West, and 5% arrived from New England. Within Quebec, while some arrived from the traditional seigneurial areas, many came from the Eastern Townships and some came from other more recently settled areas, including Témiscamingue. Francophones’ recent residences were also clustered, with many arriving from a few counties, Berthier, Montreal, Champlain, Dorchester, Wolfe and Napierville.

**Micro-Scale Factors**

Micro-scale factors that influence migration include age, family (position in the life cycle) and family situation (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992). Tables 1 to 3 provide information on French-Canadian families who migrated to southwestern Saskatchewan. They also compare these families with those who moved to settlement areas in Quebec, to New England and with repatriates. This comparison is used to examine whether French Canadians who migrated to southwestern Saskatchewan differed from those who moved to New England, a large and growing center of industry at this time, and to compare them with repatriates and French Canadian families who settled in Quebec’s colonization areas.

Tables 1 and 2 show that French Canadian families who moved to New England were headed by relatively old household heads. In addition, Ramirez (1991b, 41-42) has commented that other families that migrated in this direction were headed by young household heads. Table 2 shows that families that migrated to New England, headed by older household heads, had numerous children. Although these children would have varied in age, several would have been of age to work in the mills. Ramirez’s younger migrants to New England generally did not have offspring, or had very few. On the other hand, tables 1 and 3 suggest that repatriates from New England were those who had headed to the region as young migrants but had returned to Quebec once they had a few children, but mostly children who were not of age to work in the factories.

Other studies have found that two types of families advantageously migrated to New England; first, singles or young married couples with few or no children and second, families with several older children. Both types of families had sufficient workers, either with both parents working and no or few children to support, or with parents and several older children working (Ramirez 1991b, 39-41; Frénette 1995). While this finding may seem most applicable in the early years of Francophone migration to New England when most French Canadians worked in the lowest paying jobs in the factories, it remained applicable in the early 1900s. Although some Francophones had reached better positions in the mills by this time, or had established businesses, other factors contributed to the perpetuation of a need for multiple wage earners to sustain large families.

First, New England cotton mills faced competition from the American South, a region that was emerging as a producer and was highly competitive. Second, other emigrants had come to New England’s factory towns and competed with Francophones. Third, even though some Francophones had managed to advance, many had not; several mill owners considered Francophones as incapable of holding such positions. All of these issues contributed to the continuity of Francophones holding lower-level positions, to salary reductions, to strikes and to cutbacks in New England’s mills (Vicero 1968; 238-239; Early 1982). Thus, Ramirez (1991a, 250) found that even in 1908, despite the fact that some Francophones had advanced in the mills, and others had, by other means, improved their situation, 40% of French Canadian families relied on the earnings of several family members.

The tables also show the ages and family structure of migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan. Those who moved in this direction somewhat resemble return migrants to Quebec, but, at the same time many who moved west were younger than the families who returned. This is also suggested in Table 2; many who moved to southwestern Saskatchewan had no or few children. Most children of these migrants, as apparent in Table 3, were relatively young. In this respect, migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan shared some resemblance with those who moved to Quebec’s frontier, for example, to Wotton. Some were families that would have been at a disadvantage in New England. Notably, however, others, particularly the youngest migrants could have lived viably in one of New England’s mill towns.

At the same time, it is suggested that the macro-scale factors, that limited land acquisition coupled with the costly rail fare to the west, may have hindered some families from moving to southwestern Saskatchewan. As previously noted, Maisonneuve (1985) found that French Canadians’ economic situation was important in the decision to migrate to New England.

Table 4 shows the occupations held by Francophone heads of household. The vast majority were farmers or farmers’ sons. Many fewer described themselves as farm labourers. A few had held other occupations associated with farming and relatively few had been professionals. These results are fairly typical of demographic studies of prairie settlers.9

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9For example see Boyd, 1989
However, the main interest in this research is to determine if migrants’ prior economic situation played a role in their direction of movement. In this regard, the relatively low number of farm labourers (or journaliers) suggests that this had an effect. Figures 8 and 9 further this assertion. First, Figure 8 shows that relatively few migrants came from Quebec’s smallest, subsistence farms. Those who did not have land, or who had less than an acre of land had practiced other occupations. On the other hand, most landowners who moved to southwestern Saskatchewan had held small, medium or sometimes relatively large farms. Also, there was somewhat of a link between the size of farm held and the migrants’ ages ($r^2$ of the association = 0.23317). Generally, older migrants, who notably often had more children, came from larger farms. Figure 9 shows that though a limited number of the migrants who were located in Quebec in 1901 had come to the study area by way of New England or a Midwestern state, those who had come via these places had held among the smaller farms of migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan. These findings show a contrast with Maisonneuves’ (1985) observations about French Canadians who moved to New England.

Table 4: Occupations of Francophone household heads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of Heads of Household (by age group, 1910)</th>
<th>Total (% of total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 20</td>
<td>20-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer’s Son</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Labourer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory/Mill</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other town trade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Professional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Household Heads With Known Occupations</td>
<td>461 (100.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Homestead files

The statistics relative to previous occupation as a farmer, farm labourer or farmers’ son may not be fully accurate. Francophones’ previous occupation was often listed on the homestead files as “farmer” while some of those who were listed as farmers were likely journaliers and others were farmers sons. Unfortunately, the data did not permit full differentiation of these groups.
Figure 8: Migrants’ farm sizes in Quebec.\textsuperscript{11}

Figure 9: Migrants’ farm sizes in Quebec and recent residence.

\textsuperscript{11}Ramirez’s (1991b) classifications of farm sizes are used though it is acknowledged that by this time farmers needed increasingly larger farms due to the transition to livestock farming.
Those who migrated to southwestern Saskatchewan were generally not among Quebec’s smallest farmers. Older migrants with more family members to transport often came from larger farms. This suggests that migratory Québécois with the smallest farms headed to New England while some with larger farms moved west. Also, some of those who moved from the smaller farms had come by step migration, heading through the United States. Finally, the relatively small families of many migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan would have contributed to lower transportation costs.

Beyond the more tangible micro-factors of age, family cycle and economics, individual perceptions also play a role in migration and are considered among the micro-scale factors affecting migration (Hoerder 1999). While the impressions that individual Francophones had of moving to the study area are unclear, some potential influences are known. Silver (1969) and Lalonde (1979) have well described the elite’s negative portrayal of the region. Still, these negative portrayals of the west contrasted with the glowing descriptions elaborated by the western missionary colonizers. The many letters from intending migrants to Father Louis Pierre Gravel, perhaps as a result of these contrasting messages, suggest a mix of impressions and a notable number who knew little of southwestern Saskatchewan (Fonds Famille Gravel). At the same time, other research has shown that previous settlement by other Francophones, and especially by family, played an important role in French Canadians’ mental maps of various parts of the North American continent. These impressions were important in the directions they took when migrating. In comparison with New England, to which many co-nationals had migrated, and from which French Canadians received ample correspondence, western Canada was little known (Takai 2001, 390).

Summary/Conclusion

When looked at from the perspective of migration systems, Francophone migration to the west was influenced by similar macro scale factors as Francophone migration to New England, though the type of families demanded by New England’s mills differed from the type of families who fared well on the Canadian prairies. The meso-scale factors too were partially similar, though family networks to New England were much stronger than those attracting migration to the west, and, as importantly, the study area was much further and more costly to move to than New England.

As a result, the micro-scale characteristics of the migrants differed. First, in terms of demographics, Francophones who moved west were relatively young though some older families also migrated in this direction. Some of the older families were parents of the younger families and were part of a pattern of extended family migration that was common in this colonization. Several of the families who moved west, the youngest and the oldest, may have fared well in New England, while others, in the middle age groups, would most likely have faced hardship due to insufficient available labour to support the family. For this last group, moving west was a better option than New England. Other reasons influenced the other two groups of migrants. Though the west attracted some of the same types of families as New England, this direction of migration represented a different family strategy than moving to New England. The move west was generally more permanent than a migration to New England. Indeed, some spent all they had to make the move and some, facing poor years for farming, would have returned if possible (Saskatchewan Ministère de la Culture et de la Jeunesse 1973a, 1973b, 1973c, 1973d, 1973e, 1973f). Short-term moves to the west generally involved harvest excursions; this to some degree represents the counterpart to the short term moves that some Francophones made to New England (Thompson 1978).

Second, the findings suggest that French Canadian migrants to the study area differed economically from those who moved to New England. The distance and cost of the move appeared to influence who migrated, and thus to influence the direction of Québécois migration. New England was accessible to Quebec’s smallest farmers, even to those with numerous families. The Canadian prairies often were not accessible to these French Canadians; this region was particularly inaccessible to Francophones with large families and little land in Quebec. Still, it must be acknowledged that the information presented here on land holdings provides only a glimpse into the socio-economic background of Francophone migrants, and considers neither other factors that affected farming, nor most of the additional temporary moves that many French Canadians made. These temporary moves, which extended beyond step migration to the prairies, also much influenced French Canadian families’ situations.

At the same time, in several respects, the French Canadians who moved to southwestern Saskatchewan resembled others who moved to the prairies. “Go West Young Man” had enticed many of them like many others. The many young French Canadians who had left limited possibilities of inheriting land, along with some who had sought a better future for their offspring are typical of migrants to Canada’s prairie frontier. At the same time, the fact that they did not represent Quebec’s least well to do is also typical of those who moved to this region (Voisey 1988, 16-20).

Finally, while not refuting Silver’s (1966, 1969) and Lalonde’s (1979) assertions that elite images of the west led to limited Francophone settlement in the region, this work adds to the contention that other factors were involved. First, the importance of chain migration rather than the elite is highlighted. Second, this research forwards Green, Mackinon, and Minns’ (2005) suggestion that economic factors were involved by demonstrating that most French Canadians who moved to the study area came alone or with small families and many had small or medium farms in Quebec. More specifically, although single farmers’ sons, without offspring to transport, moved to the study area without having held land in Quebec, older Francophones

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12 Lamarre 1998 also comments on French Canadian farmers’ movement to Michigan as following other French Canadians who had moved to the fur trade and frontiers and who had made the region known to them.
who came, often with families, came from small, medium and occasionally from large farms.

Further Research

Further research could elucidate on additional local factors linking the particular locales with southwestern Saskatchewan or other areas of Francophone settlement. Though family and acquaintance links have been identified, Gurak and Caces (1992) have noted that research of this type needs to move beyond the linkage provided by family and friends and should consider how linkages varied over time, and how changes in the macro-scale and meso-scale factors led to the selection of different types of migrants over time. For instance, additional research could consider whether those who came to Francophone settlements considerably later than the first comers were similar in terms of individual characteristics. Moreover, Garigue (1960) has pointed out that family strength, an important link in the migration chains in this study, varied in Quebec. The relative contributions of family network and economic background in this migration could be further examined. Thus, if the sources allow, highly detailed study of the establishment and development of links between parishes in Quebec and the west may be desirable. Some communities are of particular interest, especially Saint Gabriel de Brandon. This parish sent many migrants west, to the study area, and many others south.

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