

Forever French: Rediscovering the French-Canadian Community of Salem

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, more than 900,000 emigrants from Québec, Canada left their failing farmlands for New England in search of employment and a better life. Due to Salem's abundance of factories, many chose to call this city home. These newly arrived immigrants found work in the local mills, built neighborhoods, opened small businesses, created ethnic institutions and began to shape the commercial life in their new city. "La Pointe" or "The Point" neighborhood and Castle Hill were the primary French-Canadian neighborhoods from the late 1800s until the mid-1900s. Although Salem's French-Canadian community is no longer as vibrant as it once was, the legacy continues to live on through remnants of the past: businesses, structures, and reminders of what once was a flourishing, admired community. The Salem State University Archives and Special Collections houses collections of photographs, oral histories, and documents capturing this legacy.

EXHIBIT BY

SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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The Point

This photograph is of The Point neighborhood after the Salem Fire of 1914 made its way through the neighborhood. The destruction left nothing but rubble and unstable chimneys. The neighborhood quickly rebuilt after this disaster, but not until after some families decided to move to other surrounding towns such as Beverly and Peabody.

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Lincoln Hotel, circa 1935

The Lincoln Hotel was a French-Canadian business that was located on Lafayette Street in The Point neighborhood. The building still remains, with small businesses on the first floor. The hotel rooms have been converted into apartments.

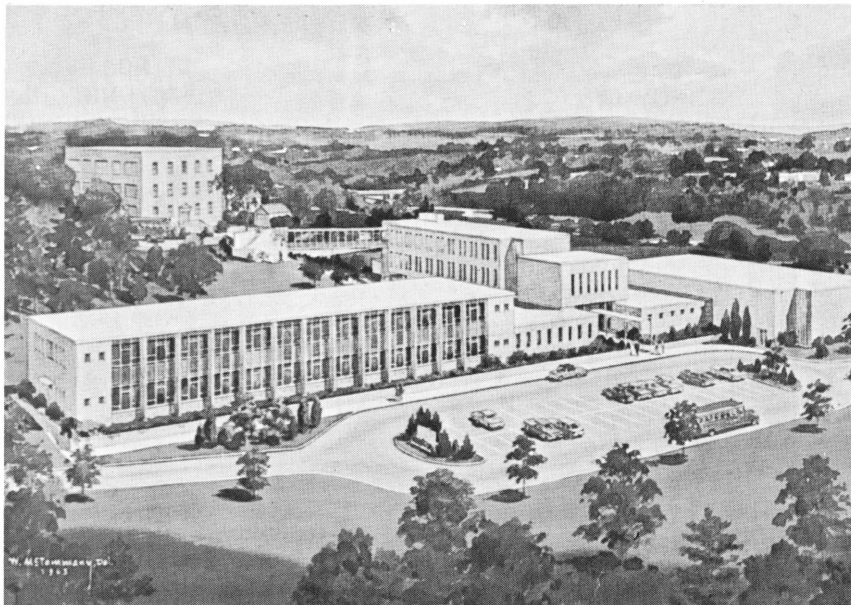
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New Derby Street, 1968

Delande's Supply Co. Inc. was one of many Franco-American businesses in Salem. It was in business for over 100 years, always owned by someone of French-Canadian descent.

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Ste-Chretienne Academy

Route 1-A Salem, Mass.

Ste. Chretienne Academy

Ste. Chretienne's Academy was an all-girls school located off of Loring Avenue. The student body was predominantly French-Canadian due to the proximity to the Castle Hill neighborhood, although the classes were not conducted in French. The Academy closed in 1971 and was subsequently purchased by Salem State; the buildings remain on SSU's South Campus.

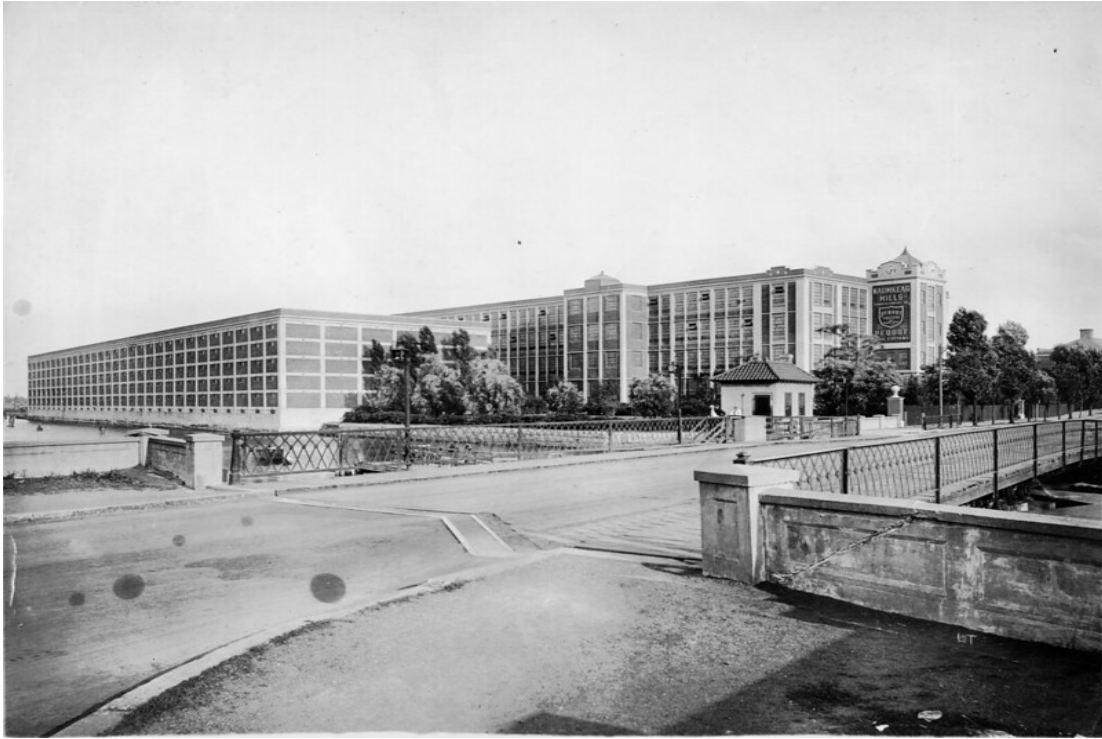
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St. Joseph's Church

The original St. Joseph's Church began construction in 1913 and was completed in 1914. Only months later, it was destroyed by the Great Salem Fire. This church was rebuilt over the next 35 years, but the basement of the original was quickly restored to hold masses. By 1950, the new St. Joseph's Church was ready to open. Following a decline in parishioners, it was torn down in 2013.

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Pequot Mills, circa 1933

The Pequot Mills, operated by the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co., was the largest employer for French-Canadians in Salem. They employed over 2,000 French-Canadians. The mills opened in 1847 and closed their doors in 1953. The Point was less than a quarter of a mile up the street, making it a convenient work place.

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Naumkeag Steam Cotton Mills Strike, 1933

Unionization at the Pequot Mill played a crucial role in French-Canadian influence in Salem. The local branch of the United Textile Workers of America called for the strike in a reaction to a proposal to make each worker handle 24 looms instead of 20. The strike ended: the number of looms remained at 20 per person, and a pay raise of 20 cents was given.

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Jefferson Avenue, circa 1900

Jefferson Avenue is the main road that runs through the French-Canadian Castle Hill district in Salem. Some houses in this photograph still stand today.

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1918 Spanish Influenza Epidemic & Ste. Chretienne's Academy

In 1918, the Spanish influenza, or "la grippe", was spreading throughout the world. The sisters from the Loring Villa at Ste. Chretienne offered their building and services to those in Salem that needed treatment. Immediately, the building opened its doors to 50+ patients for over a month.

University Archives



The Point, circa 1950

This aerial photograph of The Point captures the tight-knit neighborhood on a larger scale. The neighborhood does extend another five or so blocks to the right, but this photograph puts into perspective the way the community was set up to benefit those living in the area, with St. Joseph's Church in the center, and the Naumkeag Mills in the.

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