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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Gabriel Crevier by Joseph Conforti

Gabriel Crevier

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Recommended Citation

Crevier, Gabriel, "From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Gabriel Crevier by Joseph Conforti" (1976). *From Immigrant to Ethnic*. 18.

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Rhode Island College

ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 19

with

Gabriel Crevier

May 4, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 7 Background of French-Canadian migration to U.S. Most came to make better living. Usually one member of family would come and would write back if work was readily available and if area seemed suitable. His family had friends in Holyoke so one sister came and found work immediately. Then other family members came--mother wanted to return to U.S. because she had been born in Cambridge, Mass. Family came in 1923.
- 52 French community in Holyoke--was prosperous city and housing was difficult to find so they stayed with friends for a month before they could move into own apartment. Father worked, mother stayed home to care for family. Within a year, all were participating in activities of the parish. Typical of all French-Canadians--church served as first source of socialization. Then people became familiar with societies outside the parish.
- 132 Lived in Holyoke for 17 years. Moved to Southbridge after marriage in 1940. Many industries in Holyoke had closed by that time, depression.
- 177 He went to school for 5 years when he first came to U.S. Then worked in shoe store and as insurance salesman.
- 211 Moved to Southbridge because friend had invited him to write for local newspaper but plans failed so he worked for American Optical Company, first as factory worker then in public relations.
- 321 Came to Woonsocket to work for Union St. Jean Baptiste.
- 337 Preservation of customs and traditions: French-Canadians were able to do this because they banded together. Many New England cities had sections made up exclusively of French-Canadian residents. Language was an important factor.

Gabriel Crevier

390 Importance of church, societies and social clubs in preserving French culture--contests, prizes, scholarships.

425 He had French radio program when he lived in Southbridge.

Tape 1 Side 2

3 Importance of church to French-Canadian community: he feels it was all important.

60 When they first came to America they didn't expect to find French-speaking priests so trouble with bishops didn't begin right away.

80 After awhile there were really 2 parishes who worshipped in the same church--English and French-speaking were really separated.

108 Parish important in preserving culture and traditions.

147 French societies were also means of maintaining culture--gatherings for socializing with own kind.

212 Insurance societies began quite soon after French-Canadians came. Began informally as death and burial societies. Later, local units consolidated.

310 Societies founded for financial reasons but also promoted preservation of culture, of language. Promoted tradition of work, of honesty, of loyalty. Some groups held classes so immigrants could learn English, could obtain citizenship.

350 Union St. Jean Baptiste works closely with church.

474 Role of social clubs--primarily recreational.