

# Manchester, New Hampshire USA

## Franco-American Heritage Tour



Courtesy of St. Mary's Bank

*At one time, New Hampshire had almost 30 mills and mill complexes scattered throughout the state. The French Canadians played a major role in the workings of the manufacturing industry. As word began to spread to Canada about the steady jobs in the New Hampshire mills, many of those who made their living farming were tempted to migrate to the Granite State to find steady work. By 1850, mill owners had begun to add immigrants to their work force, especially the French-speaking farmers of Quebec.*

*As French Canadians began moving into the communities, neighborhoods began to absorb a French flavor. These areas were called "Little Canadas" and consisted mostly of French and Catholic families. Many French priests came down from Quebec and by 1891 there were 175 French-speaking priests living in the French parishes of New England.*

To begin your tour, start your day with a tasty breakfast at [Chez Vachon](#). Located at 136 Kelley Street, this eatery serves breakfast all day and is known for its delicious crepes, which are served plain or with fruit.

Another favorite in this dining establishment is their poutine, a classic French-Canadian dish that consists of French fries, topped with cheese curds and ladled with spicy chicken gravy. Bon Appétit!

After breakfast, take a moment to visit [Sainte-Marie Parish](#) at 133 Wayne Street, in the heart of Little Canada. The parish was established in 1880 to ease the overcrowding of the city's first French-language Catholic church, Saint Augustine's, founded in 1871. In 1906, Quebecois artist Ozias Leduc was commissioned to decorate Sainte-Marie's interior. Today, it is a beautiful place to visit, known for its culture and beautifully crafted architecture.

Now it is time to see where the first credit union in the United States was created by a French Monsignor and his two business associates. [St. Mary's Bank](#), on the corner at 200 McGregor Street, had its humble beginnings in 1908 when Monsignor Pierre Hevey wanted a safe place for his parishioners to save their money and establish credit. Together with Alphonse Desjardins and local attorney Joseph Boivin (who housed the credit union in his home), the men began the first credit union in the United States called St. Mary's Cooperative Credit Association. "La Caisse Populaire Ste-Marie" (St. Mary's Bank of the People) began a movement that now includes over 10,000 credit unions in the country, consisting of 80 million members. The bank has helped many people through difficult times, including the bankruptcy of Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in 1935.

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As we continue along our trip, you will find that [Manchester](#) was once the home to the [Amoskeag Mills](#), the largest mill complex in the world. Today, you can find remnants of this long gone industry in the Queen City and the Franco-Americans who made their mark in the community. Over recent years, the Mills have been restored and are home to many businesses, restaurants and a college.



Courtesy of Chez Vachon Restaurant

Ironically, the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company now houses the [Millyard Museum](#) at 200 Bedford Street. The 'Woven in Time' Exhibit traces how the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company developed its noted mill complex and how it shaped Manchester into the largest planned city in New England. Discover what life was like for the people who came here from Canada and other countries to start new lives.

Next, you can research your French-Canadian roots and visit the [American-Canadian Genealogical Society \(ACGS\)](#), at 4 Elm Street. They have many experienced volunteers that are happy to assist in getting you started on finding your ancestral heritage. Many records can be found at ACGS, including copious amounts of parish records from New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, the Provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, as well as others that will help you to find the marriages of your Acadian, Franco-American and French Canadian ancestors.

After your visit at the ACGS, take in some history at the [Franco-American Centre](#) at 52 Concord Street. The Franco-American Centre celebrates the richness of the Franco-American experience and strives to preserve the heritage of the New Hampshire French communities. Here you will find a variety of cultural programs, a library, musical performances, French classes and art exhibits.

Time for dinner? Manchester offers an array of Franco-American restaurants for you to choose from. Try [Richard's Bistro](#) at 36 Lowell Street. This 5-star restaurant has been categorized as "American & French eclectic" with traditional foods, updated for today's tastes, in addition to newly created dishes. Don't forget to try their homemade desserts. Now in its fifteenth year, Richard's features delectable French selections, like Truffle Braised Escargot in Puff Pastry and Slow Roasted Chicken with Baby Carrots and Potato Gratin.



Courtesy of Millyard Museum

Looking for some home-style comfort food? [The Red Arrow Diner](#) at 61 Lowell Street offers some Franco-American favorites 24/7 in case you get the urge for tourtiere in the middle of the night. Voted one of the Top 10 Diners in the Country, this is a must-visit for travelers and celebrities alike. Try one of their Blue Plate Specials (which include American Chop Suey and pork pie), their famous "Dinah Fingers" or their homemade pies! The perfect ending to your day in Manchester.