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# Holyoke's French-Canadian Community in Turmoil: The Role of the Church in Assimilation, 1869-1887

**Peter Haebler**

Major French-Canadian migration to New England began after the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The combination of declining agricultural productivity, as well as a high birth-rate, and the increased labor needs of New England textile manufacturers induced tens of thousands of French-Canadians to seek a better life in the United States. They settled largely in small and medium sized factory towns, bringing with them the language, customs and institutions of French Canada. The French-Canadians have long been considered to have been extremely clannish and resistant to the processes of assimilation and acculturation. This historical picture of French-Canadians is still common, nourished by large French-speaking populations in many New England factory towns and, until a generation ago, a strong French Catholic school system.

The intent of this article is to modify the traditional view of French-Canadian resistance to cultural change. The struggle which took place within the French-Canadian parish of Holyoke, Massachusetts between the pastor, Andre B. Dufresne, and a large number of the parishioners, reveals that cultural adjustments played an early and central role in the development of this French-Canadian community. The nature of this struggle indicates that the French-Canadian perceptions of the role of the Church changed as the immigrants' aspirations and values were modified by the industrial experience. Finally, this incident reveals that while the French-Canadian community in Holyoke was not quickly "Americanized" or assimilated, it did experience a process of rapid acculturation.

Holyoke, Massachusetts was built in the 1840's as a planned industrial community. Situated next to a fifty-four foot waterfall on the Connecticut River some seven or eight miles above Springfield, the town was incorporated in 1850. Backed by Boston capital, Holyoke's promoters wished to imitate the success of Lowell, Lawrence, and Chicopee Falls, by making the town a model textile-producing center. While Holyoke's growth was uneven and it eventually became internationally famous for the manufacture of paper products, textile production played an early and continuing role in the town's economy. Early labor needs were met primarily by native New Englanders and Irish immigrants. After the Civil War, the town's economic growth and a catastrophic agricultural decline in Quebec combined to lure thousands of French-Canadians to Holyoke. By 1900, the French-Canadian population was estimated to be 13,000, almost thirty per cent of the city's total population, making Holyoke the sixth largest French-Canadian center in New England.<sup>3</sup>

For the first French-Canadians in Holyoke, the Church was their most important social institution. The founding of the French-Canadian parish in 1869 was an indication both of the French-Canadian community and its developing ethnic self-consciousness.

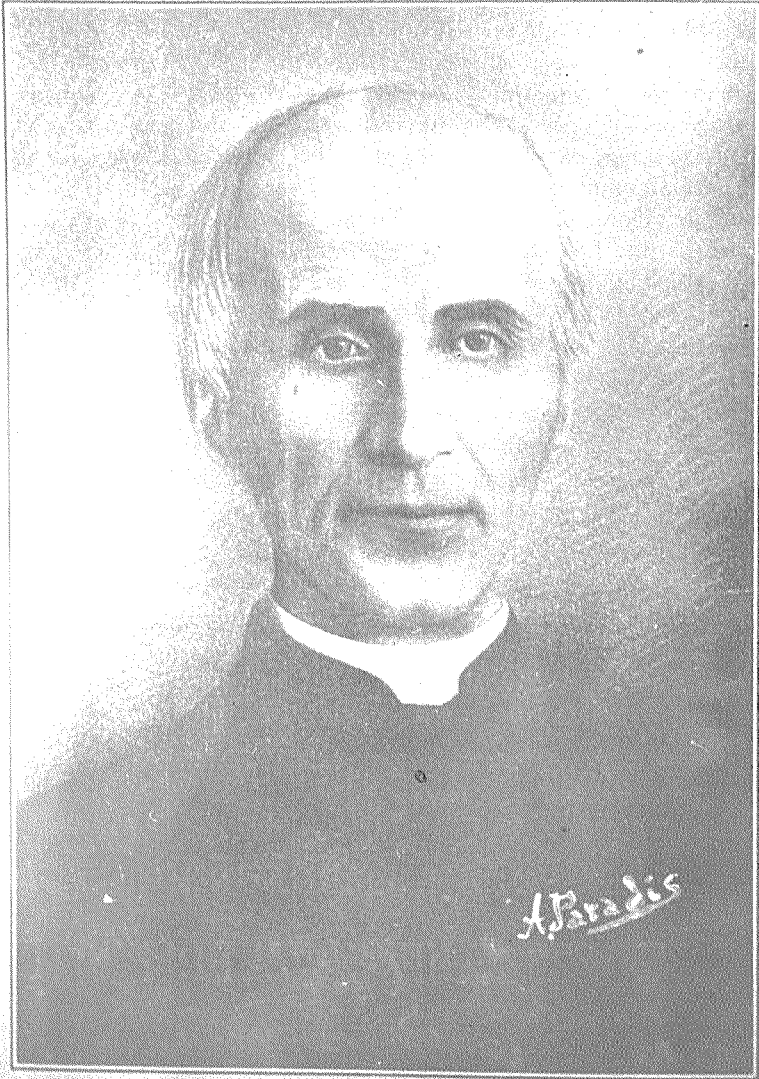
The first Catholic church in Holyoke, St. Jerome's, had been established in 1856, but it provided little comfort for the French-Canadians. The church was staffed entirely by Irish priests, and the services were conducted in Latin and English. An inadequate knowledge of the English language discouraged many French-Canadians from attending Mass regularly at St. Jerome's. In addition, rivalry with the Irish made many French-Canadians uncomfortable in the Irish church.<sup>4</sup>

By 1865 local French-Canadian leaders had become concerned that the lack of adequate religious guidance was causing an increasing number of their group to fall away from the Church. In that year, there were twenty-two marriages recorded in Holyoke in which at least one party, as indicated by surname and place of birth, was French-Canadian. In seventeen of these marriages both parties were French-Canadian, but eleven couples were married outside the Catholic Church and five of these ceremonies were performed by the local Baptist minister. Of the twenty-two marriages, only eight were conducted by a Catholic priest. In 1869 French-Canadians were further shocked when they discovered that a number of French-Canadian girls were receiving religious instruction and English lessons at a local Protestant Church.<sup>5</sup>

In 1868 a delegation of three French-Canadians went to Boston to ask Bishop John Williams to create a French-speaking parish in Holyoke. Until the establishment of the Diocese of Springfield in 1870, Western Massachusetts Catholics were under jurisdiction of the Boston diocese. Bishop Williams was one of the few prelates in the Catholic hierarchy who favored the formation of ethnic parishes and had actively sought French-speaking priests for Massachusetts. He indicated his willingness to authorize a new parish, provided that the French-Canadians could show a substantial number of potential parishioners. Accordingly, the French-Canadians conducted a census in late 1868 or early 1869. This census provided the first reasonably accurate indication of the size of the French-Canadian population in Holyoke. The count revealed the following:

299	male heads of households
1286	women and children
161	young people of both sexes who lived in boarding houses and whose parents did not live in Holyoke
<hr/>	
1746	Total French-Canadian population

This census convinced Williams that Holyoke could support a French-Canadian priest and he appointed Father Andre Benjamin Dufresne.<sup>6</sup> Dufresne was born in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec and received a classical education at the Séminarie St. Hyacinthe. He embarked upon a teaching career, which included a position as a professor of economics at St. Hyacinthe's, before becoming a priest in 1856 at the relatively advanced age of thirty-seven. Following his ordination, Father Dufresne served in a number of parishes in the Province of Quebec, but became ill, and in 1864 was assigned to the post of Director of Missionaries for the Diocese of Sherbrooke. Later he served in the important office of Vicar-General of the diocese. In the late 1860's Dufresne was a middle aged, "tall, spare" man who spoke little English. He had considerable administrative experience in the Church hierarchy and late in life entertained the hope that he might be elevated to the position of Bishop of Burlington, Vermont. Perhaps his decision to come to New England was born of a desire to obtain the necessary credentials for a bishopric. There is no hint of his personal motivation, but in 1868 Father Dufresne, recovered, from his illness and supplied with a letter of recommendation from the Bishop of Sherbrooke, offered his missionary services to various French-Canadian communities in the United States. Shortly thereafter he was assigned to Holyoke.<sup>7</sup>



REV. A. B. DUFRESNE  
Premier Curé du Précieux Sang

Father A. B. Dufresne. Illustration from the *Golden Jubilee of the Parish* (1919). Located in Precious Blood Rectory, Holyoke, Mass.

In April 1869 Father Dufresne arrived in Holyoke and began the tasks of organizing a parish and constructing a church building. By the summer of that year Fr. Dufresne's efforts were showing signs of success. The *Holyoke Transcript* reported that the Sunday Mass, conducted in a rented hall, attracted an overflow crowd of at least 700 with prospects for even larger attendance. In addition, several hundred children attended Sunday School where religious instruction was given in French. The newspaper expressed approval of Dufresne's undertaking, pleased that the growing French-Canadian population now had an energetic and effective shepherd to insure a degree of social control over a potentially disruptive element. The paper concluded that "our French population is rapidly increasing by immigration and propagation and the moral influence of a French church can scarcely fail to be of great benefit to them and the community at large."<sup>8</sup>

The Holyoke Water Power Company, anxious to make Holyoke attractive to French-Canadian labor, offered without cost, one of three sites for a church. The pastor selected a location on Cabot Street in the southern part of the town. Construction of a temporary wooden church progressed to the point where it was possible to hold services there on Christmas 1869, only eight months after Fr. Dufresne's arrival. This achievement was evidence of the priest's energy and skill, and of the eagerness of French-Canadians to have their own parish. One indication of the effectiveness of Father Dufresne and the unity achieved by the French-Canadian community is illustrated by the Holyoke Marriage Register. In 1870, the first full calendar year of Dufresne's pastorate, there were 24 marriages in which at least one party was French-Canadian. In 21 of these marriages both parties were French-Canadian and all were married by Father Dufresne. In two of the three remaining cases, one partner had a Yankee surname and both had their marriages performed by Dufresne. The last marriage, between an Irish male and a French-Canadian woman, was celebrated at St. Jerome's. Thus, in 1870, all the marriages involving French-Canadians were performed by a Catholic priest and all but one by a French-Canadian priest.<sup>9</sup>

The larger community's hope that the church would serve a stabilizing function was fulfilled, although there were some lapses. On one occasion, the *Transcript* noted with obvious indignation that a French-Canadian funeral ended with a livery horse race between two carriages occupied by some of the bereaved. More typical, however, was the extensive coverage that the newspaper gave in 1872 to the first major celebration in Holyoke of the Feast of St. Jean Baptiste, patron saint of French Canada. The day's activities included a public parade and procession and appropriate church services. The *Transcript*, with paternal condescension, remarked on the absence of disorder and drunkenness and concluded that the celebration was a "credible affair, fitly illustrating the strength and character of the French-Canadian population."<sup>10</sup>

The parish quickly outgrew the capacity of the original church. In the spring of 1872 Father Dufresne conducted a parish census. The priest estimated Holyoke's French-Canadian population at 3000, almost double what it had been only three years earlier. The next summer Dufresne announced plans to construct a new brick church on a site adjacent to the original structure. However, the priest encountered difficulties in raising the needed funds. The details are not known, but it appears that the nation-wide economic downturn, which affected Holyoke in the latter part of 1873 and caused some French-Canadians to return to Canada, was an important factor. Eventually the task of raising money was put into the hands of several prominent French-Canadian businessmen. Construction of the new church was not begun until early 1875.<sup>11</sup>

The construction delay proved to have tragic consequences. During vesper services on the evening of May 27, 1875, a fire started by an altar candle swept through the wooden church. The structure was packed with an estimated 600-800 worshippers and as many as ninety-two perished in the fire or died in subsequent weeks or months.<sup>12</sup>

The parish showed considerable resiliency in recovering from the trauma of the fire. Although the new church was not completed until 1878, a parish school was opened in 1876 and Father Dufresne was making plans to construct a new parish rectory. The completed church, which cost \$60,000, was named the Church of the Precious Blood, a designation which it retains to the present.<sup>13</sup>

To this point the narrative description of the founding of the first French-Canadian parish and early labors of Father Dufresne has given some indication of the transformation and growth of one important institution in the French-Canadian community. The church provided needed stability and served as a focal point for French-Canadian social activities. Essentially this development represented a collective triumph over the adversities of poverty and the tragedy of the fire. However, in the late 1870's and early 1880's, the pastor who had served as a unifying force, quite suddenly became a disruptive element in French-Canadian life in Holyoke and church activities became scenes of conflict. Ostensibly Father Dufresne was the cause of the controversy. Beyond the actions of one man, however, there were larger conflicts illustrating that many French-Canadians were eager to come independently to terms with the new conditions of life in their adopted homeland. Dufresne's conception of his duties and responsibilities as pastor was modeled on the traditional role of the *cure* in French Canada. The pastor's paternalism and authoritarian behavior came into conflict with the changing expectations of a large segment of Holyoke's French-Canadian community. Occuring within a decade after the first major influx of French-Canadians to Holyoke, the Dufresne controversy is illustrative of the

cultural adjustments and adaptations that many French-Canadians experienced after their migration to the United States.

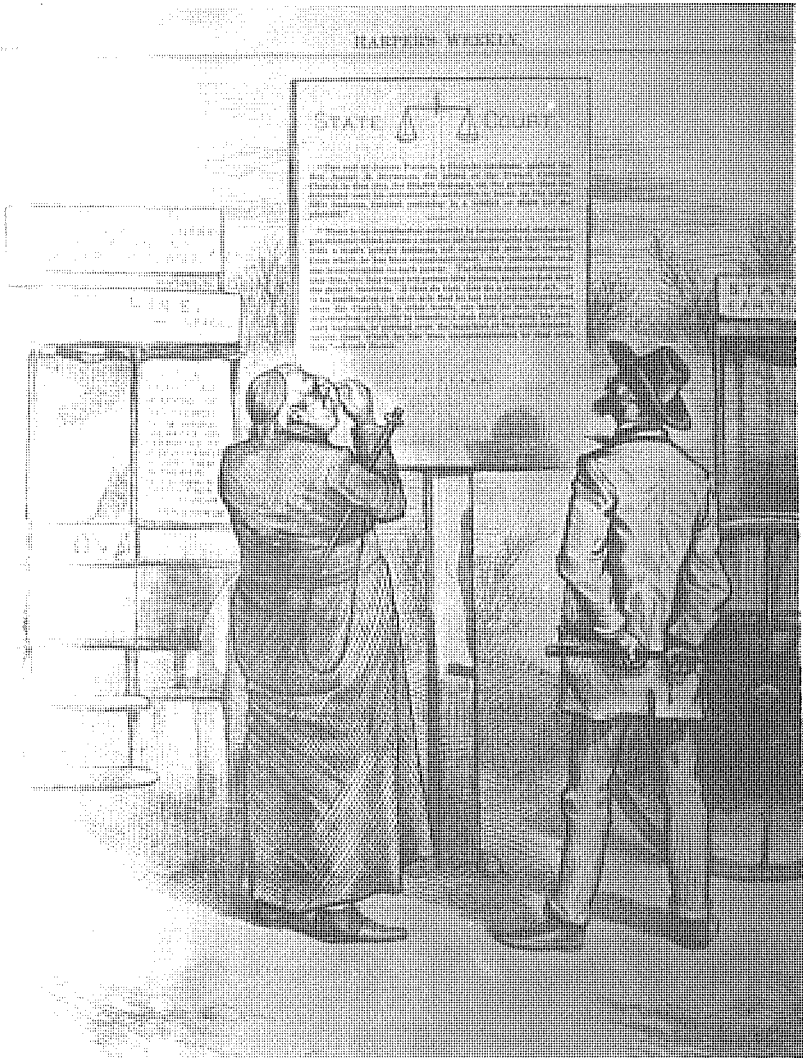
The controversy that swirled around Father Dufresne began in 1878 and took many forms. A civil suit brought against him by Joseph Parker initially unleashed frustrations and anger which some parishioners felt about their pastor. The Parker case began in 1876 with the appearance in Holyoke of Father Charles Chiniquy. Chiniquy, a French-Canadian and renegade Catholic priest, had left the Church and had established his own religious group. Chiniquy was active in missionary work in Canada and the Midwestern United States. On occasion, he came to New England. Chiniquy's message emphasized the venalities and autocratic nature of the Catholic hierarchy, and he achieved a certain degree of notoriety among the more militant anti-Catholic Protestants. French-Canadian Catholics were a special target for Chiniquy and he often preached in French to whet their curiosity and attract their interest.<sup>14</sup>

In March 1876 a forthcoming visit by Chiniquy was announced in the local newspapers. At Sunday Mass, Father Dufresne forbade any of his congregation to hear the renegade priest. However, several parishioners, whether from curiosity or out of stubborn defiance of their pastor's edict, did attend. When Dufresne learned that his command had been disregarded, he directed that the culprits make their transgressions known to him. If they failed to do so, Dufresne threatened excommunication. Joseph Parker was singled out for special attention. Parker, a French-Canadian who ran a livery business, denied that he had ever attended the Chiniquy meeting and claimed that Father Dufresne had publicly excommunicated him without cause. Further, the priest directed that the people of his parish should not hire Parker's hacks for funerals or weddings, and if they did he would not perform the ceremony. In a civil suit which Parker filed in October 1878, he claimed that the ecclesiastically imposed boycott had ruined his business and he asked for \$10,000 in damages.<sup>15</sup>

Testimony presented during the legal proceedings provide an indication of Dufresne's conduct as pastor and of the influence which he had in the French-Canadian community. One party related that they arrived for a funeral using one of Parker's hacks and were turned away by Father Dufresne who told them, "When you know better than to come in those hacks I will do your work and not before."<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Potvin, who had been part of the group responsible for establishing the parish, gave an indication of the effect of the boycott by stating that he had refrained from using or recommending Parker's service because he was afraid that Dufresne might take similar action against him and ruin his business. Dufresne asserted in his defense that he had acted "in performance of his duty as a Roman Catholic priest and with a view to the enforcement of ecclesiastical



discipline." Further, he contended that his actions were in accord with the rules and regulations of the Church and thus were not meant to be willful or malicious acts to injure Parker's business.



Thomas Nast cartoon, from *Harper's Weekly*, December 6, 1879, page 960.

The judge's charge to the jury was most direct. "Our laws do not allow any ecclesiastical authority to interdict a man from pursuing his ordinary business or prevent even members of the same denomination from which he had been excommunicated to deal with him."<sup>18</sup> The jury awarded Parker the sum of \$3433.<sup>19</sup> The decision received widespread notice and provided a measure of comfort to opponents of Catholicism. The case was the subject of a Thomas Nast cartoon<sup>20</sup> and the *Springfield Republican* commended the verdict, claiming that it "shows that superstitious fidelity to priestly authority is greatly weakened."<sup>21</sup>

The Parker case was not an isolated incident. Rather it was a catalyst which released long contained resentments and complaints against Father Dufresne. From 1878 until 1882, Dufresne was engaged in a continual controversy with a sizable part, and perhaps even a majority, of his own parishioners. In December 1878 a remarkable letter appeared in the *Holyoke News*. It was signed "French Catholic," and neatly summarized the complaints of many churchgoers in Precious Blood parish. More importantly, the letter vividly illustrated that Dufresne, by attempting to run his parish as if it were in rural Quebec, was going to meet with fierce opposition. Although there is no clue as to authorship of the letter, the issues raised and the subsequent disputes over many of these same complaints, attest to the sincerity of the frustrations expressed.

The letter began by noting that the new church, which had been dedicated earlier that year, was built by a great sacrifice of all of Holyoke's French-Canadians. Although the new building was a proud achievement, the parish was now divided into two classes, the rich and the poor. The writer charged that the rich worshiped in the main body of the church, and when they married or died services were held in the nave upon payment of a \$20-\$30 fee. However when poor parishioners were in need of the same services, they had to pay \$10-\$15 and were allowed only the use of the basement facilities. "Had not Christ shed His blood for the poor equally?" the writer lamented. The exorbitant prices had had their effect, for in the past weeks, the writer continued, three French-Canadian couples were **married by Protestant ministers**, and thus were automatically excommunicated. French-Canadians in Holyoke were mainly laborers making from 75 cents to \$1.25 per day, the letter continued, and could not afford the exorbitant fees.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the writer explained that the parishioners were told that they must pay the priest \$1 per month as a tithe, a heavy burden for a large family. While the tithes were the only means of support for Canadian parishes, in Holyoke the priest received a \$600 annual salary and the fees from marriages, funerals, and baptisms for his personal use. French-

Canadians would pay even these fees without a murmur, the letter continued, if their pastor was poor and the parish in need. But Father Dufresne was the owner of much valuable property in Holyoke and many French-Canadians felt they were more needy than their priest.<sup>23</sup>

The letter writer's final complaints were thinly veiled references to the Parker case. The writer expressed irritation at the continued threats of excommunication, possible closing of the church, and Dufresne's preference for the public recital of transgressions instead of preaching the word of God. The past Sunday Father Dufresne had charged five parishioners with "perjury," presumably because they had given depositions in the Parker matter. "How could these five persons be guilty of that crime when they swore to what they heard him, Fr. Dufresne, say publicly in the presence of the whole congregation and when many more members are ready to testify to the same facts?"<sup>24</sup> The letter concluded by stating that the anonymous and public expression of dissatisfaction was chosen because if the complaints were made in person the individual "would be cruelly and unrelentingly persecuted both in and out of the Church."<sup>25</sup>

The newspaper printed Father Dufresne's emphatic denial of the charges, but no matter how strong the denials, a real schism had taken place in Precious Blood parish. There is no evidence of any other public criticism of Dufresne for nearly a year following the publication of the letter in the *News*, but immediately upon learning of the verdict in the Parker case in November 1879 the parish erupted. A movement was begun by some of Dufresne's opponents to petition the bishop to create a new French-Canadian parish. The ostensible rationale for the division request was that the parish now numbered over five thousand and that this many people overtaxed the facilities of the church and the energies of the priest. While there was considerable merit to this argument, other issues emerged as well. At Precious Blood, as was the case in many churches, pews were rented, in this instance at the rate of \$5 per quarter. Many poorer families could not afford this sum and were required to sit in less desirable sections of the church or to stand during Mass. Also, some French-Canadian businessmen had become suspicious that Father Dufresne had turned their customers against them and thus they were willing to aid the effort to get a new priest.<sup>26</sup>

Dufresne was not without his supporters within the parish. While it is not possible to determine how many were caught up in the dispute on either side, there is some evidence to indicate that the battle lines were drawn largely between generations. Older French-Canadians tended to believe that the "trouble" was caused by younger people who had acquired some notions of independence by mingling with non-French-Canadians and now did not care much for religion or the "good of the Church." The nature of this

division is quite significant, indicating the difficulties of maintaining old customs and behavior patterns in new and different circumstances. Members of the older generation, who had spent most of their lives in Canada, found it difficult to justify what they believed to be a personal attack on their pastor, a person whom they had always treated with outward deference, respect and perhaps even regarded with awe.<sup>27</sup>

The leaders of the parish division movement collected nearly 300 signatures for their petition, one name per family. In the early months of 1880, the disgruntled parishioners held overflow meetings in order to pass resolutions, select committees to present the petition to Bishop Patrick T. O'Reilly of Springfield, and to hear the subsequent reports.<sup>28</sup>

Bishop O'Reilly gave the Holyoke delegations sympathetic hearings, but avoided making any commitments. The Bishop found himself in an uncomfortable position. Although there seemed to be sufficient population growth to justify a second French-Canadian parish, experienced French-Canadian priests were not easy to find. In addition, the Bishop must have been reluctant to give direct offense to Father Dufresne who he believed had done an excellent job in founding and sustaining the parish. O'Reilly appears to have viewed his role in this situation as that of a conciliator. In March 1880 he appointed a French-Canadian priest to serve as an assistant to Fr. Dufresne. Father Dufresne had run Precious Blood alone for nearly eleven years and Bishop O'Reilly believed that the addition of a new priest would make it easier for Dufresne to cope with the administrative duties of the large parish. Undoubtedly, the Bishop hoped that the young curate would provide a buffer between the pastor and the more dissident parishioners. However, the immediate reaction from Dufresne's opponents was negative, and they again asked the Bishop to create a new parish.<sup>29</sup>

Time might have soothed some of the more bitter feelings had it not been for a bizarre turn of events which took place in mid-March of 1880, less than two weeks after the appointment of the new curate. On March 12th, Dufresne suddenly departed for Canada, leaving in his wake rumors, suspicions, and accusations. A complicated and confusing story emerged which indicated that the priest had sold wine illegally. Dufresne maintained that it was given freely to parishioners for medicinal purposes, a practice common in French Canada. A Federal revenue agent had received information that the priest was selling wine, and he confronted Father Dufresne with the charge. There is no indication of who transmitted this information to the revenue agent, although it was generally believed to be individuals who wished the parish division to be carried out.<sup>30</sup>

A week later, Dufresne returned to Holyoke amid charges and countercharges. No legal action was taken against him, although the priest purchased a federal liquor license at a cost which included a penalty and implied guilt. But the liquor issue renewed efforts to get a second French-Canadian parish for Holyoke. However, leaders of the division movement acknowledged a serious problem. If division was achieved, diocesan policy would dictate a separation on territorial lines. Church rules required all families to receive special services such as baptisms and funerals from the church in the parish in which they lived. Many of Dufresne's most vocal opponents lived near Precious Blood Church and even if the parish were divided they would still be dependent on him for certain religious services. Thus, it is likely that the advocates of parish division hoped that the unfavorable publicity that Fr. Dufresne had received would induce the Bishop to transfer him from Holyoke.<sup>31</sup>

Bishop O'Reilly, aware that matters in Precious Blood parish were becoming more serious, went to Holyoke on Sunday, April 4th. After Mass he met in the church basement with about one thousand men of the parish. They indicated their dislike for Father Dufresne in "plain terms," stating also they had \$35,000 pledged for the construction of the new church if O'Reilly would order the division. Once again, the Bishop refused to commit himself and promised only to give the matter serious consideration.<sup>32</sup>

The controversy did not lead Dufresne to take conciliatory measures. The next Sunday he denounced his opponents from the pulpit and refused to rent pews to anyone who had signed the division petition. His backers sent their own petition to the Bishop in which they expressed their opposition to any parish division and accused Dufresne's foes of "spreading . . . false malicious charges." They concluded that the parish would be better off without "misled sheep."<sup>33</sup>

Father Dufresne's opponents waited in vain for the Bishop to act. Bishop O'Reilly took no public action to resolve the conflict, and Dufresne remained pastor of an undivided Precious Blood parish until his death in 1887. The situation in the parish never again reached the intensity of the conflicts of 1879-1880, but there are indications that the bitterness lingered on. In July 1880 a new mutual benefit society, the Union of St. Joseph, was created at Precious Blood. Dufresne was chosen as spiritual director of the organization, and none of the officers, as best as can be determined, played an active role in the parish division movement. It appears that the Union of St. Joseph was Dufresne's personal device to seek revenge against his opponents, many of whom were prominent in the older St. Jean Baptiste Society. Within two weeks of the founding of the new group, the St. Jean Baptiste Society had revised its by-laws with the intent of giving the Society more freedom from the Church and by implication, from Father Dufresne.<sup>34</sup>

During the next two years at least a half dozen other incidents were reported in the newspapers concerning disputes between Dufresne and individual parishioners. Most involved Dufresne's refusal to perform baptisms or rent pews to those who had expressed opposition to him. Bishop O'Reilly, by his inaction, gave tacit approval of Father Dufresne's actions.<sup>35</sup>

The disputes between Father Dufresne and some of his parishioners reveal that the issue involved more than personality conflicts. At stake was the role that the priest could play in an American French-Canadian community. In addition to his pastoral duties, Dufresne also acted as a banker and property owner, roles which frequently brought him into conflicts having nothing to do with his priestly functions. His investments were probably not made from inherited wealth as there is no indication that his family had money. More likely Dufresne's position as pastor provided him with capital for investment purposes. He received from the diocese a modest annual salary which was supplemented in several ways. By a tradition which survived into the mid-twentieth century in the United States, collections taken in crowded churches at Easter and Christmas were considered personal gifts to the pastor. In addition, his prerogatives included *stole fees* — payments for performing weddings, funerals and baptisms.

In Canada there had been a strict schedule of payment for such services. For example, a large fee for a funeral would provide for a more elaborate ceremony than a smaller sum, and a family's social standing was judged in part by the type of church services they could afford. In the United States, the custom developed that the priest would accept any gift that the family offered, with little if any variations in the service performed. However, Father Dufresne adhered rigidly to the Canadian tradition with its highly structured fee schedule. The early years of Dufresne's tenure probably did not produce much in the way of financial rewards. However, as the parish grew and the French-Canadian community became more prosperous, the emoluments of the pastor might well have been considerable. This speculation is borne out in part by the fact that Dufresne's name does not appear on the list of those individuals who paid \$100 or more in local property taxes until 1874, five years after his arrival in the city.<sup>36</sup>

Prior to the founding of a French-Canadian-owned bank in 1889, French-Canadians of moderate or little means had difficulty in obtaining loans from Holyoke's banking institutions. Father Dufresne provided one source of financial aid for the French-Canadians. Two incidents reveal the extent to which Dufresne pursued his financial interests. A young French-Canadian man borrowed money from Father Dufresne to purchase an apartment block. The terms of the loan specified that the money would be

repaid at noon on a certain date. As the day approached, the borrower realized that he would not be able to acquire the necessary funds until sometime in the afternoon of the appointed day. He asked the priest to extend the limit for a few hours or renegotiate the loan. Dufresne refused, foreclosed on his note and took possession of the building.<sup>37</sup>

In early 1879 Father Dufresne brought suit against a tavern owner, Peter Monat, on the grounds that Monat had defaced a building that the priest owned. Dufresne claimed that in erecting a building that was adjacent to his, Monat had used the wall of the Dufresne building as a parti-wall and had put holes in the building joints. In court Monat maintained that he had a verbal agreement with the priest to proceed as he had. The judge believed Monat and dismissed the charges against him. A few months later, Monat, who had testified against Dufresne in the Parker case, found that agents of the priest had removed the contents of his uncompleted building and had put them on the sidewalk. Incidents such as these were bound to weaken Dufresne's position as spiritual shepherd of the French-Canadians in Holyoke.<sup>38</sup>

Father Dufresne's maneuvers sometimes got the best of him. During the liquor license dispute, he transferred some of his property to other French-Canadian citizens, on a temporary basis, perhaps because he feared possible attachment or wanted to avoid embarrassment if the extent of his holdings were revealed. The priest made an agreement with one French-Canadian contractor in which he sold an apartment building to the contractor for \$1 with the understanding that when the troubles were over the property would return to the priest on the same terms. When Dufresne attempted to regain title to the building, the contractor innocently responded, "What apartment house?"<sup>39</sup>

Father Dufresne died in May 1887 but controversy concerning him did not end with his death. All the property of the parish, including the church building had been bought in Dufresne's name. In his will, written in Holyoke in September, 1886, but filed in his hometown of St. Hyacinthe, Father Dufresne left the bulk of his property, including the church, to Bishop O'Reilly. However in October 1887, two of his nephews contested the will in Probate Court. They lost, but the decision was reversed on appeal by the State Supreme Judicial Court in April, 1888. The major burden of the nephews' case was that Dufresne had been a resident of Massachusetts when he died, but that his will reflected Canadian not Massachusetts law in that there was no attesting attorney nor proper witnessing of the document. The Supreme Judicial Court concurred, agreeing that the priest's will had no validity in the Commonwealth and all the property, including the church itself, belonged to the nephews as next of kin. One can only imagine the

consternation that the decision brought to diocesan officials. The diocese quickly began elaborate but secret negotiations with the nephews. The final arrangements are obscure, but the church property remained intact and title was transferred to the Bishop.<sup>40</sup>

The significance of Father Dufresne's tenure in Holyoke can easily be obscured by the personal issues in which he was so constantly embroiled. To be sure, the priest's stubbornness and apparent pecuniary self-interest caused many of his problems. However at the root of all these disputes was a fundamental cultural conflict. To the end of his life Dufresne was a French-Canadian priest in the most encompassing sense. In spite of his seventeen years in the United States, Dufresne remained culturally isolated. He never tried to master the English language and the manner in which he drafted his will indicated that he had little interest in what occurred outside the French-Canadian community. In every major action that he took, Father Dufresne was functioning as tradition in French Canada dictated. He ran Precious Blood in the same manner that he would have directed a parish in Quebec. The French-Canadian *curé* was in part shepherd and protector of his people and this was entirely consistent with Father Dufresne's efforts to protect French-Canadians in Holyoke from the harmful and corrupting influence of a Rev. Chiniquy.

The French-Canadian *curé* was also the spiritual father of his parish. Father Dufresne was attempting to exact a measure of paternal discipline in his actions against Joseph Parker and others who defied his will in the parish division matter. As he stated at the Parker trial, Father Dufresne felt that he was only exercising his rightful powers as a priest and that to do less would have been a dereliction of sacred duty. Such actions would not likely have been questioned in French Canada. As comforter of the sick, Dufresne distributed wine out of a sense of Christian charity, but his action conflicted with the laws of the United States. The highly structured system of fees for special church functions was still in operation in Canada when Dufresne practiced it in Holyoke. Even in his personal business affairs, there is no evidence that the priest used his wealth to enhance his material comfort. Rather, he used his authority as leverage on his capital in order to enrich his parish. His ultimate intentions were made clear by his will which left virtually all his property to Bishop O'Reilly and thus to the diocese which he had served so long.

Father Dufresne's difficulties within his own parish illustrate how quickly the traditions and customs of the French-Canadians had eroded. This is not meant to imply that the French-Canadians in Holyoke in the 1880's had become Americanized, but rather that as a group they were forced to deal with a non-French-Canadian world more so than did Father Dufresne



and that they were able to change their values and expectations accordingly. Those French-Canadian merchants and builders who had achieved a degree of material prosperity and positions of prestige and authority in the French-Canadian community, and who provided the leadership of the opposition to Father Dufresne, would not meekly accept the often arbitrary paternalism of their pastor. Thus, while French-Canadians in Holyoke long maintained a separate cultural identity, this culture had undergone significant changes in its transmission from French Canada to New England as evidenced by these conflicts within the local parish.

#### NOTES

1. Prior to 1900, most French-speaking emigres from Quebec referred to themselves as "French-Canadians," "Canadians," or "French," appellations which helped them define their place in American society. Only in the first decade of the twentieth century did the term "Franco-Americans" find acceptance, providing another indication of the French-Canadians self-conception and heralding a new phase of their history in the United States.
2. For a historiographical review see Richard S. Sorrell, "Franco-Americans in New England," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, V (Spring, 1977), 90-94.
3. Constance McLaughlin Green, *Holyoke, Massachusetts: A Case History of the Industrial Revolution in America* (Hamden, Conn.: 1968), *passim*. Originally published in 1939.
4. Precious Blood Parish, "Canadians in Holyoke," (Holyoke, 1969), pp. 1-2. Mimeographed; Paroisse Du Precieux Sang, "Jubilé D' Or Paroissial," (Holyoke, 1919), p. 9. (Anniversary booklet).
5. Holyoke, *Marriage Register*, City Clerk's Office, Holyoke City Hall, 1865; *Holyoke Transcript*, February 27, 1869.
6. *Transcript*, February 27, 1869; "Jubile d' Or Paroissial," p. 11; "Canadians in Holyoke," p. 2; Interview with Monseigneur Roger Viau, Chancellor of the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts, August 26, 1974.
7. "Jubile d' Or Paroissial," p. 11; E. Hamon, *Les Canadiens-français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre* (Quebec: 1891), p. 236.
8. *Transcript*, August 14, 1869.
9. *Ibid.*, April 17, 1869, December 11, 1869, January 8, 1870; Holyoke, *Marriage Register*, 1870; Hamon, *Les Canadien*, p. 237; "Canadians in Holyoke," pp. 2-3.
10. *Transcript*, April 30, 1870, May 14, 1870, June 22 and 26, 1872.
11. *Ibid.*, April 10, 1872, May 17, 1873, October 24, 1874; *Springfield Republican*, December 11, 1873, September 21, 1874; "Canadians in Holyoke," p. 3.
12. "Canadians in Holyoke," pp. 3-4; Hamon, *Les Canadien*, pp. 237-238; John J. McCoy, "Diocese of Springfield," in *History of the Catholic Church in the New England States*, ed. by William Byrne and Others (Boston: 1889), II, p. 674; *Transcript*, May 29, 1875, June 2 and 5, 1875. In the confusion of the moment many victims were counted twice and the problem was compounded because both French and Anglicized spellings of some of the names of the dead were recorded separately.
13. *Transcript*, June 26, 1875; *Republican*, May 9 and 30, 1878, June 5, 1878; *Holyoke News*, May 8 and 29, 1878; "Canadians in Holyoke," pp. 4-5; "Jubile d' Or Paroissial," p. 13.
14. Charles P. T. Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* (New York: 1886), *passim*.
15. Massachusetts, Hampden County Superior Court, *Joseph Parker vs. A. B. Dufresne*, Case #102, filed October 7, 1878; *Transcript*, March 19, 1879, *Republican*, October 24, 1878; *Holyoke News*, March 19, 1879.

16. *Transcript*, November 12, 1879.
17. *Parker vs. Dufresne*.
18. *Transcript*, November 12, 1879.
19. *Ibid.*, November 12, 1879, July 16, 1880; *Republican* October 29, 1879, November 12, 1879, July 16 and 17, 1880; *Parker vs. Dufresne*.
20. *Harper's Weekly Magazine* (December 6, 1879), 960.
21. *Republican*. November 12, 1879.
22. *Holyoke News*. December 28, 1878.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
  
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, January 4, 1879; *Republican*. November 17 and 26, 1879. The *Transcript*, the major Holyoke newspaper available during this period, showed considerable reluctance to discuss Fr. Dufresne's difficulties, perhaps as a matter of civic pride. The *Transcript* made no mention of the Parker case until the final verdict had been reached, even though the case had been in litigation for more than a year. The paper also made little mention of the petition movement until it was in an advanced stage. Fortunately for the historian, the *Springfield Republican* had no such inhibitions and indeed over the years seemed to delight in exposing any volatile issues which arose in the smaller, but growing industrial city to its north. The *Republican's* biases towards the parish division petition drive were revealed when it commented: "This experience is teaching the people a little independence. It is encouraging to see the superstitious veneration of priests weakening and when a priest learns that he will be blamed like any other man for doing wrong, he will be more apt to do right." November 26, 1879.
27. *Republican*. December 3 and 9, 1879.
28. *Ibid.*, December 1, 2, 5 and 8, 1879, January 10, 1880, February 5, 1880.
29. *Ibid.*, March 8 and 10, 1880. The name of the curate was not reported. Fr. Dufresne did not introduce him to the congregation, as was customary, an omission which further antagonized the pastor's opponents. The parish history, "Jubilé d' Or Paroissial," does not include the names of any assistant pastors who served before 1884.
30. *Republican*. March 16 and 17, 1880; *Transcript*. March 17, 20 and 24, 1880.
31. *Republican*. March 27, 1880, April 2 and 3, 1880; *Transcript*. April 3, 1880.
32. *Republican*. April 6, 1880.
33. *Ibid.*. April 13, 1880; *Transcript*. April 21, 1880.
34. *Republican*. June 9, 1880, July 26, 1880, August 7, 1880; *Transcript*. July 24, 1880.
35. *Republican*. August 10, 1880, July 29, 1881, March 2, 1882; October 7, 1882; *Transcript*. May 31, 1882.
36. Interview with Msgr. Viau, October 11, 1974; Lists of individuals who paid \$100 or more in property taxes were printed in both the *Transcript* and *Republican*, usually in August of each year. See also Horace Miner, *St. Denis, A French-Canadian Parish* (Chicago, 1939), p. 224.
37. Interview with Msgr. Viau, August 26, 1974.
38. *Republican*. February 12 and 19, 1879; *Holyoke News*, April 9, 1879.
39. Letter to author from Jacques Ducharme, October 4, 1974.
40. Massachusetts, Hampden County Probate Court, *Estate of A. B. Dufresne*, File #15335. Fr. Dufresne's will is included in a packet which also contains various legal documents related to the appeal of his nephews; *Transcript*, May 16 and 17, 1887, October 5, 1887, April 25 and 26, 1888, July 20 and 24, 1888, December 4, 1888; *Republican*. May 12 and 17, 1887, July 10, 1887.