

## Germain Lemieux and the Transmission of Collective Memory in French Ontario

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Father Germain Lemieux  
(photo: Centre franco-ontarien de folklore)

### Biographical notes

Father Germain Lemieux S.J. was born in Cap-Chat, Gaspé county, Quebec, on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1914. In 1941, he came to *Collège du Sacré-Coeur* in Sudbury, where he taught Greek and Latin studies intermittently until 1957. Except for the years he spent studying in Montreal for his degree in theology (1944-1948), and then in Quebec for his master's degree and PhD in Canadian Studies (1953-1955 and 1959-1961), he spent most of his active career in Ontario. He taught history at the new University of Sudbury from 1957 to 1959 and at Laurentian University from 1961 to 1965; he was a folklore professor during a brief stay at Université Laval from 1965 to 1968 and then returned to Ontario to devote himself completely to folklore studies.

The series of field expeditions that Father Germain Lemieux initiated in Northern Ontario on September 12, 1948, led to the founding of the

*Institut de folklore* at the University of Sudbury in 1960, which, under its own charter, became the *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore* in 1972. An impressive list of accomplishments grew out of these activities, including the publication of nearly fifty books and pamphlets, most notably *Les vieux m'ont conté*, the complete collection of folk tales and legends collected by Father Lemieux among his francophone elders. It was on this sound foundation that a university-level program in Folklore was established at the University of Sudbury in 1975. In 1981 it became the Folklore Department, and in 1995, the Department of Folklore and Ethnology of French America, which now offers a full program of study leading to a bachelor's degree in ethnology, both on campus and by correspondence.

The importance of Father Lemieux's folklore career has been recognized in Canada and abroad, especially through the many prizes and distinctions awarded to the collection *Les vieux m'ont conté*. The excellence of his ethnological work has also been recognized by honorary doctorates from York University, the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University. An international symposium was dedicated to him in 1991.<sup>1</sup> In 1998, the fiftieth anniversary of his first field studies, the *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore* created in his honour the exhibition « *Passeur de mémoire en Ontario français* » ("Memory Lives on in French Ontario"), which later toured various museums in Ontario and Quebec. In August 2001 Father Germain Lemieux stepped down as Research Director for the *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore* and, after sixty years in Sudbury, retired for good to the Jesuit residence in Saint-Jérôme, Quebec.

Jesuit researcher, professor, folklorist, sculptor and musician, Father Lemieux liked to describe himself as a jack-of-all-trades. But if one term had to be agreed upon to do justice to his person, it would without a doubt be "keeper of the Franco-Ontarian memory" or, better yet, "transmitter of collective memory". His work, in both the span of time covered and the breadth of the materials documented, remains unparalleled and irreplaceable in the annals of French Ontario.

### ***Franco-Ontarian Folk Song***

In 1948, at the prompting of Father Lorenzo Cadieux, his former professor from Gaspé, who had recently founded the *Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario*, Germain Lemieux began the field studies which would occupy him for the next twenty-five years. Conceived of as a “survey in our Franco-Canadian parishes” in the area around Sudbury,<sup>2</sup> the materials collected in these expeditions would eventually make up the archival collection of the Franco-Ontarian Folklore Centre. The stories he found in Verner, the first parish on his list, were so interesting that he decided to expand his activities to other areas. He eventually covered, at first alone, then in collaboration with student researchers, the entire section of Northern Ontario stretching from Mattawa to Sault Ste-Marie.

As early as 1949 he began justifying his ambitious program by publishing in the *Documents de la Société historique* the first installment of *Folklore franco-ontarien, Chansons [I]*; a second volume followed the next year. In these booklets he presented some forty songs selected from those collected in his earliest field studies. The favourable reaction of the press and public, as well as that of French-Canadian and European folklorists, encouraged him to continue his research.

In 1963 Lemieux wrote the column “Folk-lore” in *L’Information*, the Sault Ste-Marie diocese’s weekly publication; the thirty-eight short articles he produced provided a sort of introduction to traditional music. The following year he revised the contents of the column under the title *Chanteurs franco-ontariens et leurs chansons*; this brochure, again published by the *Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario*, provided a description of the functions, themes and subjects of the songs in his Folklore Institute’s growing collection. Ten years later he prepared a two-volume anthology for the same editor: *Chansonnier franco-ontarien 1* and 2, containing 112 songs chosen from the 3,118 in his collection. In 1986 Éditions FM re-edited this anthology in three installments as *Les vieux m’ont chanté*.

With these publications, Lemieux has been until now the most faithful disseminator of this traditional genre in French-speaking Ontario. The vast majority of his folksong research nevertheless remains unpublished and underappreciated.

### ***The Popular Folk Tale***

It was under the tutelage of Luc Lacourcière that Germain Lemieux became interested in folk tales. Fascinated by the French Ontario oral tradition, he enrolled in Laval University’s Masters program in

1953, planning to undertake with Lacourcière a comparative study of the hagiographic folk tale *Placide-Eustache* (Aarne-Thompson 938). The same year, he published for the Historical Society a brochure entitled *Contes populaires franco-ontariens*, a slender volume containing the revised version of two popular folk tales collected in the course of his fieldwork in the Sudbury region. A second brochure, *Contes populaires franco-ontariens II*, followed in 1958, presenting three other popular folk tales in the same way. In hindsight, these two small volumes heralded the enormous undertaking that would later occupy twenty years of his life, the thirty-three-volume collection of folktales titled *Les vieux m’ont conté*. That was still to come; first he finished his Master’s thesis in 1955, then wrote and defended his PhD thesis on the same subject. The dissertation, *Placide-Eustache: Sources et parallèles du conte-type 938*, was published in 1970 by *Presses de l’Université Laval* in the “Archives de folklore” collection.

### ***The Master Work***

The year 1972 marked a new beginning. The *Institut de folklore* obtained a legal charter and became the *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore* (Franco-Ontarian Folklore Centre). Lemieux’s book *Les Jongleurs du billochet: conteurs et contes franco-ontariens* was published jointly by the *Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario*, Bellarmin of Montreal and Maisonneuve et Larose of Paris. An introduction to the immense work that was to follow, *Les Jongleurs* presented the background and the material culture of Father Lemieux’s story-tellers as well as the techniques used by the author in his research in French-speaking Ontario. In addition, it provided a biographical sketch and portrait of the main storytellers who had died before 1972.

In 1973, Germain Lemieux finally began the presentation of his masterpiece *Les vieux m’ont conté*. In the course of 32 volumes that would appear approximately every six months until 1991, the publishers—Bellarmin of Montreal and Maisonneuve & Larose of Paris—delivered to the public over 10,000 pages containing all of the 646 folk tales and legends collected and annotated by Germain Lemieux and his collaborators between 1953 and 1980. Two-thirds of these tales had been collected in Ontario; the rest were the result of Lemieux’s field studies in New Brunswick, Quebec and Manitoba. The texts appeared in two versions: an original version, with the words and sounds of the storytellers transcribed verbatim, and a revised version in literary French. A thirty-third volume concluded the series with an analytic index and a glossary of popular French.

The publication of this amazing body of work had immediate and lasting effects on ethnology studies in French Canada. Dozens of reviewers from many disciplines applauded, commented on and critiqued the publication of these repertoires. But these were not the people Lemieux was working for. In the first volume of the collection, he set out another goal:

Our objective, once again, is to make our oral literature known to a greater public, so that one day it can reach an artist who will let himself be won over by these stories.<sup>3</sup>

Father Lemieux encouraged literary and artistic adaptations to be drawn from his work and in fact he himself often collaborated with artists. Serge Wilson and Claude Poirier produced five comic strip albums in the collection “*Contes de mon pays*” by Héritage publishing house, as did Luc Robert, who produced with Father Lemieux an illustrated version of *Ti-Jean, fin-voleur*, a favourite Franco-Ontarian folktale that was published by *Prise de Parole* in Sudbury. Finally, artist Claire Guillemette-Lamirande published in 1979 *Contes et couleurs de l’Ontario français*, a reproduction of a series of nine watercolours illustrating Father Lemieux’s folk tales.

### ***The Pedagogical Function***

Germain Lemieux never lost his initial motivation, which was, above all, educational. As a teacher at Sudbury’s Collège du Sacré-Cœur, he discovered links between the stories in Greek mythology that he taught and the folk tales that he heard during his childhood in Cap-Chat. He was constantly trying to make his students—at high school and later at university level—aware of the presence of myths in their culture. In 1979, he wrote:

Un premier étage d’enseignement à Sudbury entre 1941 et 1945 me permit de constater que les étudiants aimaient encore les contes. Pour mieux fixer dans leur mémoire les nombreuses tâches d’Hercule, je leur racontais un extrait de récit paysan où Jean de l’Ours ramenait sous son bras le dragon à sept têtes ; l’éducation de Jean Poilu n’était pas si différente de celle d’Héraclès. Notre Ti-Jean canadien nettoyait aussi rapidement les étables du roi que Héraclès, les écuries d’Augias. J’en avais la certitude, notre folklore pouvait jouer un grand rôle dans un certain renouveau pédagogique. D’ailleurs, selon quelques hypothèses sérieuses, le conte primitif n’avait-il pas un but pédagogique ? Que l’on songe à l’Iliade et à l’Odyssée dans l’éducation des jeunes Grecs!<sup>4</sup>  
[English translation in endnote]

This educational emphasis further explained the largest part of his work, both in academic and popular circles. As of 1961, in a series of five articles published from June to September in Ottawa’s *Le Droit*, he demonstrated that our unschooled storytellers had borrowed from Eastern traditions, and he applied himself to revealing the Oriental influences in Franco-Ontarian oral tradition. He would pursue this revelation in his “*Folklore*” column, in a series of twenty-four articles from December 1963 to June 1964. This material, which he frequently restated and improved throughout his university teaching, was revised and published in 1968 by the *Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario*, under the title *De Sumer au Canada français, sur les ailes de la tradition [From Sumer to French Canada on the Wings of Tradition]*.

### ***Final Comments***

Today, Father Lemieux’s work lives on thanks to the institutions he created. First of all, the *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore*<sup>5</sup> continues its mission to keep folklore and heritage alive for the people of Ontario. The complete collection of the 646 folk tales and stories will be found here, along with the 3,118 songs Father Lemieux documented.



*Centre franco-ontarien de folklore à Sudbury  
(photo: Centre franco-ontarien de folklore)*

In 1991 Ontario's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Recreation recognized the Centre as a provincial heritage organization. The institution also received the Parks Canada prize from the Ministry of Canadian Heritage in 1996, highlighting its remarkable contribution to the conservation and promotion of Ontario’s French heritage.

For its part, the department of Folklore and Ethnology of French America at the University of Sudbury is pursuing the more academic goals of Father Lemieux’s project by training students interested in the field of heritage studies. Since 1981, as part of their course work under their professors’

direction, students have launched fieldwork studies all over Ontario. In twenty-five years, they have accumulated thousands of ethnographic documents; this archive is currently being organized to provide a valuable resource for students, researchers and the general public.

In the case of Father Germain Lemieux, it is easy to see how the work of one man managed to preserve a large part of French Ontario's collective memory and ensure that this living heritage would continue to inspire artists and researchers for generations to come.

### **Germain Lemieux Bibliography**

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*Chanteurs franco-ontariens et leurs chansons*, Sudbury, SHNO, « Documents historiques » 44-45, 1963-1964, 113 p.

*Contes de mon pays*, Montréal, Héritage, « Katimavik », [1978], c1976, 159 p.

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*De Sumer au Canada français sur les ailes de la tradition*, Sudbury, SHNO, « Documents historiques » 51-52, 1968, 73 p.

*Folklore franco-ontarien : chansons I et II*, Sudbury, SHNO, « Documents historiques » 17, 1949, 48 p., and « Documents historiques » 20, 1950, 48 p.

*Le Four de glaise*, Sudbury, Prise de parole, and Laval, Éditions FM, 1981, 58 p.

*Les Jongleurs du billochet : conteurs et contes franco-ontariens*, Sudbury, SHNO, « Documents historiques » 61-62-63, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, and Montréal, Bellarmin, 1972, 134 p.

*Placide-Eustache: sources et parallèles du conte-type 938*, Québec, PUL, « Archives de folklore » 10, 1970, VIII-214 p.

*La Vie paysanne 1860-1900*, Sudbury, Prise de parole, and Laval, Éditions FM, 1982, 239 p.

*Les vieux m'ont chanté*, Laval, Éditions FM, 1986, 3 volumes.

*Les vieux m'ont conté*, Montréal, Bellarmin, and Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1973-1993, 33 volumes.

*Les vieux m'ont conté*, Montréal, Bellarmin, and Laval, Éditions FM, 1981, 2 volumes.

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### Notes

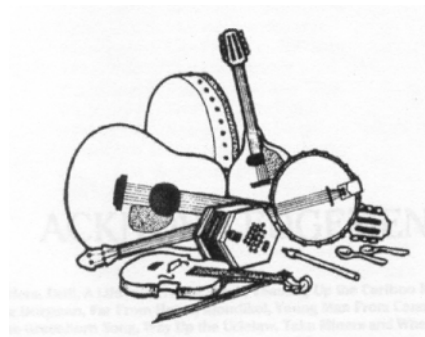
<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the conference were published as *L'Oeuvre de Germain Lemieux, s.j. Bilan de l'ethnologie en Ontario français. Actes du colloque tenu à l'Université de Sudbury les 31 octobre, 1<sup>er</sup> et 2 novembre 1991*, sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Pichette, Sudbury, Centre franco-ontarien de folklore, 1993, 529 p.

<sup>2</sup> Germain Lemieux, *Chanteurs franco-ontariens et leurs chansons*, Sudbury, SHNO, « Documents historiques » 44-45, 1963-1964, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lemieux, *Les vieux m'ont conté*, vol. 1, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> "During an early teaching period between 1941 and 1945 in Sudbury, I noticed that students still enjoyed folk tales. In order to help them remember Hercules' numerous tasks, I told them part of the peasant tale where Jean de l'Ours brought back the seven-headed dragon under his arm; Jean Poilu's education was not that different from Hercules'. Our Canadian Ti-Jean cleaned the king's stables as quickly as Hercules did those of Augias. I was sure that our folklore could play a large role in a pedagogical revival [of francophone culture in Ontario]. Moreover, according to some reliable hypotheses, did not the original folk-tales themselves have a pedagogical purpose? Just think of the role of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the young Greek's education!" G. Lemieux, « La Sauvegarde du patrimoine oral », dans René Dionne (dir.), *Propos sur la littérature outaouaise et franco-ontarienne*, II, Ottawa, la Société des écrivains canadiens, octobre 1979, p. 90.

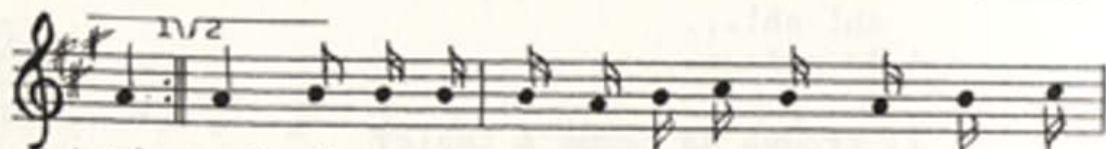
<sup>5</sup> The Centre is online at <http://cfof.on.ca>.



**LE PETIT MARI \***  
(Mich'tan, mich'tou)



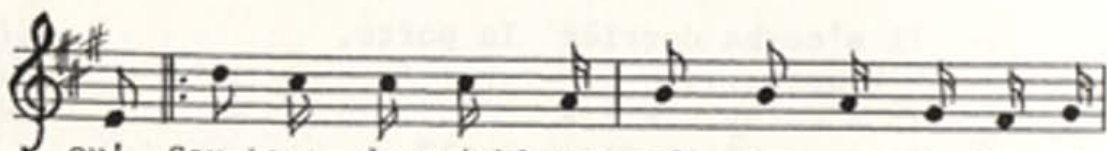
1- Mon pèr' m'a don-né t-un ma-ri, Mich'tan, mich'



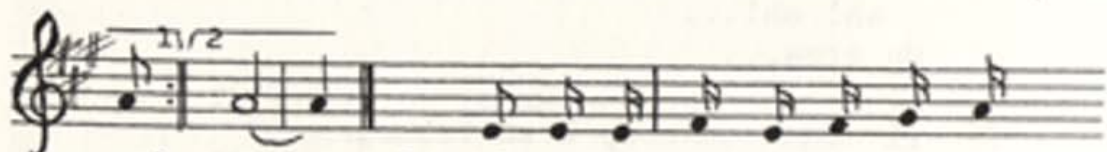
tou! -tou! Il me l'a don-né si pe-tit, Mich'tan, mich'



tou! Du ouich'- ton gaf! du for- gaf-



ou! Sau-tons, du ouich'-ton gaf! Dansons, du forgaf-



ou! -ou! 2- Il me l'a don-né si pe- tit...

2. Il me l'a donné si petit, Mich'tan, mich'tou! (bis)  
Dedans mon lit je le perdis!  
Mich'tan...

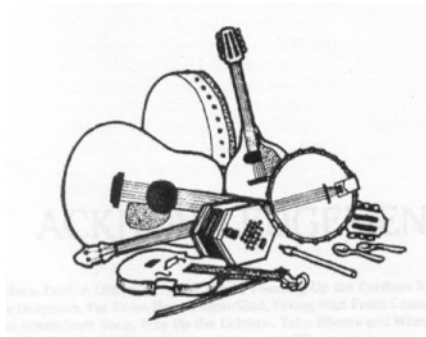
3- Dedans mon lit... (bis)  
J'ai pris la paille et la brûlis,  
Mich'tan...

4- J'ai pris la paille... (bis)  
J'ai trouvé mon mari rôti,  
Mich'tan...

\* Informatrice: Mme Philémon Guillemette (Anna Dion, 70 ans, 1954),  
Astorville, Ont.; arrivée en Ontario en 1885; ver-  
sion apprise dans son enfance, de ses parents

- 5- J'ai trouvé mon mari... (bis)  
 Sur les tablett's je le placis,  
 Mich'tan...
- 6- Sur les tablett's... (bis)  
 Le chat l'a pris pour un' souris,  
 Mich'tan...
- 7- Le chat l'a... (bis)  
 O chat, gros chat, lâch' mon mari!  
 Mich'tan...
- 8- O chat, gros chat... (bis)  
 Ah! si jamais je me r'marie,  
 Mich'tan...
- 9- Ah! si jamais... (bis)  
 J'en prendrai un de six pieds et d'mi.  
 Mich'tan, mich'tou,  
 Du ouich'ton gaï,  
 Du for gaïou!  
 Sautons, du ouich'ton gaï,  
 Dansons, du for gaïou! } bis

[Source: *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore*]



LES OUTILS DU BEAU MARÉCHAL \*

$\text{♩} = 116$

The musical score consists of seven staves of music in G major, 9/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 116. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various time signature changes: 9/8, 6/8, 9/8, 6/8, 9/8, 6/8, and 9/8. The lyrics are written below the notes.

1- Beau ma- ré- chal, beau ma- ré-  
chal, sur la foi de ton â- me! â- me! Voudrais  
tu gué- rir (e) la têt' de ma fem- me?  
fem- me? J'ai tous per-du mes ou-tils: mon en-  
clume et mon mar- teau, Mon é-querre et mon ra-  
bot. O ma li-me, quand je li-me, mon p'tit  
bout' il va par de- vant! -vant!

\* Informateur: Gédéon Savarie (58 ans, 1958), Hagar, Ont.; ver-  
sion apprise de son père, Euclide, vers 1913.

- 2- Beau maréchal, beau... (bis)  
 Voudrais-tu guérir(e) les pieds de ma femme? (bis)  
 J'ai tous perdu...
- 3- Beau maréchal, beau... (bis)  
 Voudrais-tu guérir(e) le g'nou de ma femme? (bis)  
 J'ai tous perdu...
- 4- Beau maréchal, beau... (bis)  
 Voudrais-tu guérir(e) la cuiss' de ma femme? (bis)  
 J'ai tous perdu...
- 5- Beau maréchal, beau... (bis)  
 Voudrais-tu guérir(e) le dos de ma femme? (bis)  
 J'ai tous perdu...
- 6- Beau maréchal, beau... (bis)  
 Voudrais-tu guérir(e) le ventr' de ma femme? (bis)  
 J'ai tous perdu mes outils:  
 Mon enclume et mon marteau,  
 Mon équerre et mon rabot;  
 O ma lime, quand je lime,  
 Mon p'tit bout(e), il va par devant! } bis

[Source: *Centre franco-ontarien de folklore*]

**Editors' Note**

A reminder that another (bilingual) version of "Papa m'a donné un mari" (from Rosaleen's repertoire, learned in the mid-1960s) may be found in *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*, Vol. 36.2 (Summer 2002), p. 19. If you are interested in francophone Canadian traditional song you may also like to refresh your recollection of the contents of Conrad Laforte's article "French Songs in North American Oral Tradition", translated in *Canadian Folk Music*, Vol. 40.4 (Winter 2006-7), pp. 1-11.

