The Folklore of le Détroit/Le Folklore du Détroit. An online exhibition of the Virtual Museum of Canada.[1]

Reviewed by Hilary Joy Virtanen

Online exhibitions provide unique advantages for curator and audience alike, including the creation of venues for materials and information ill-suited for physical presentation, the availability of the exhibition to a wider audience, and the potential for instant access to the materials. These three features are found in many of the online exhibitions that I have viewed, and all are well-illustrated in the bilingual exhibition *The Folklore of Le Détroit/ Le Folklore du Détroit.*

This exhibition, presented through the Virtual Museum of Canada by the Windsor Public Library and Windsor's Community Museum (Ontario), explores oral traditions of francophone communities along the Detroit River, a 30-mile ribbon of water between Ontario and Michigan that separates the cities of Windsor and Detroit. This isolated linguistic community, first established in 1701, has maintained and shaped many traditions, from both France and francophone regions in Canada. While the focus of the exhibition rests largely on Canadian communities, retaining a stronger French heritage due to historical circumstances, Michigan's Detroit *francophonie* also provide rich examples.

The exhibition homepage identifies the target audience as schoolchildren around grade five. The exhibition and the lesson plan materials provided within, however, are aimed more widely toward primary and secondary students. The content is presented in both French and English, with separate sites for each. The design is largely geared toward children, with charming graphics and numerous clickable sound and animation files to illustrate the materials.

The French and English sites are nearly identical, and will be described here as one with sections noted by their English names. The opening page depicts a traditional village along the river. Using Macromedia FlashPlayer, clickable graphic icons lead into different portions of the exhibit, including a red house representing the "Introduction," a pear tree for "Legends of le Détroit," a chicken coop for "Folktales of le Détroit," a school for lesson plans, a barn for feedback, and a church as the site map. Icons at the top of the screen lead to a site search engine, an interactive storytelling area, lesson plans, the credits, and the Virtual Museum of Canada.

The village-themed icons connect to a page of textual topical links including, in the introduction for instance, a description of the Détroit francophones, the group's three main genres of oral traditions, and the environment in which such traditions were, and are, shared. In this section, one may also link directly to the three genre-themed areas, or to any of the sections offered in the homepage, by clicking on the thematic icons on the left side and top of the screen.

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Folktales, songs, and legends are identified as the three major types of French oral tradition and form the foci of the presentation. Each section presents a definition of its given genre, as well as discussion of local variant sources and other interesting facts, and then a number of examples from each. Thirteen folksongs, twelve legends, and three folktales are provided textually, with slight variations between the French and English language sites: in the French site, variants are provided in the original tongue with glossaries for archaic and dialectic words when necessary. In the English version, the folksongs are provided in French with English language summaries, while the legends and tales are presented in English, retaining ,when possible, the teller's oral style.

Select examples include clickable audio files, particularly in the French site. This is not offered for examples that come from written and multiple accounts, including the legend of the Red Dwarf /Nain Rouge, a malevolent figure known since the founding of Detroit and reportedly seen in times of trouble. Audio files are particularly effective in the folksong section, where visitors can appreciate the sound of the music. They are offered in the French site for some of the folktales as well.

Original computerized illustrations of images, both historical and modern, decorate the pages. The French "Cinderella," for instance, features the heroine in a blue ball gown. For the folksong, "De terre en vigne," about the process of winemaking, the graphic features a male modern hipster holding a martini glass, with a matchbook in the foreground bearing, "De terre vigne [sic]," on the cover. In some instances, the illustration expands into an animated short, which can run as a song plays, or as a tale is related. When presented with a tale or legend, the text runs silently within the animated clip. An appealing animation clip accompanies the folksong, "La laine de mon mouton" which details the transformation of wool into textile. A young boy takes the wool from his sheep, following the process related in the song, eventually presenting his sheep with a new sweater. Both audio and animation files require QuickTime to play.

The only drawback to these otherwise excellent presentations is that, especially in the animation for the legend "The Will O' the Wisp (Les Feux Follets)," the text may not remain on the screen long enough for one to read aloud, as a teacher might do in a classroom. Additionally, the animation may suit younger viewers more than the fifth grade target audience. This, however, is not detrimental, as it can only expand the potential audience.

When appropriate, supplementary materials are included, enhancing the educational impact of the lore. In the introduction, one may view a linked map of the region during early French settlement. Accompanying the legend of "The Jesuit Pear Tree," are two scanned articles from the *Detroit Free Press* from 1941, describing one particular pear tree, planted by early Jesuit priests in the region, as were many others, in a group of twelve to represent the Twelve Apostles of Christian tradition. Additionally, photographs of some of these historic trees may be viewed, and one can read a recipe for marinated pears provided by Cécile Bénéteau from Rivière-aux-Canards, Ontario.

Lesson materials focus on multiple aspects of the exhibition and are targeted for students throughout primary and secondary education levels. Included are ideas for dramatic and artistic creations, word puzzles, and spelling/handwriting practice sheets. Also provided are suggestions

for character analysis exercises and other activities, ranging in subject area from literature and language to computer science.

All lesson materials are offered in English and French as Microsoft Word-format documents. Music materials, particularly sheet music if available, would be a welcome inclusion, considering the fact that the exhibition cites folksong as "easily the healthiest traditional genre still found in the local communities." Teachers can expand upon the lesson potentials for themselves, however, creating activities for such subjects as French language and Michigan/Ontario history.

The exhibition highlights a sense of continuity and history throughout. Many examples of lore have roots in archaic French forms, including the song "Quel Petit Homme," which the exhibition text describes as possibly "delighting young and old for over a thousand years." Others, often also from longstanding French traditions, reveal local history. One finds in the legends of "Blessing of the Fields," and "Blessed Loaves: Young Howe's Drowning," the parish priest in each story is a Father Loiselle, who served his community at the turn of the 20th century. These legends came from different informants, and so reflect the importance this figure held in the community.

This exhibition is consistent in naming the precise sources of folklore variants, including when possible, the collector and the informant as well as the date and place of recording and the archives in which they are housed. Québec's University of Laval and Detroit's Wayne State University are each noted for their archived materials. Also important are handwritten notebooks of lyrics known as "scribblers," which often provide our only glimpse of old traditional songs.

The different roles of collectors and their works are also discussed: 19th-century francophone Marie Caroline Watson Hamlin was known for her avocational collection of local French folklore and Joseph Médard Carrière was a Harvard-trained researcher of North American francophone folklore and language throughout the middle of the 20th century. Since the 1980s, University of Windsor researcher Marcel Bénéteau, a collaborator in this presentation, has been active in collecting local folksong.

Including the names of tradition bearers is particularly important on two levels: first, it demonstrates the crucial role of the individual within "the folk." Additionally, these variants were largely collected during the past century, making it possible that these individuals' descendents may access the materials and realize their forebears' status as a tradition bearer.

This presentation illustrates well the potential that such exhibitions hold for educators, researchers, and the public. With folkloric material, aural and printed texts cannot always be translated well into an exhibition gallery, which is when this genre of presentation is invaluable. The well-designed format allows for casual visitors to browse freely, and for educators to incorporate the materials into well-developed lessons across age levels.

While online exhibitions have potential for technical problems—I did find one minor broken link to two documents comparing modern and older French-Canadian language transcriptions—the democratization of information that they provide compensates for them. Visitors are often able to

provide their direct feedback and to add to the conversation that the exhibition opens up. The general purposes of anthropological and folkloric museum work—to educate, entertain, and reveal the intricacies of human cultures—are all successfully met here, and as this genre of presentation further develops, I sincerely hope more social science and humanities researchers will consider such venues to share their work with the public.

www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Folklore/indexE.htm (English version)
www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Folklore/indexF.htm (French version)

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