

Although it is situated 1000 kilometers from Québec, Southwestern Ontario has a long ‘francophone’ history. Many French-Canadian families of the region are descendants of settlers from the New France era who remained here after the Conquest. This is a distinguishing regional characteristic because, with the exception of Acadia, the great majority, if not all, French-Canadian communities outside Quebec are descendants of migrants from that province.

Over the years there has been a strong erosion of the French fact in the region. For instance, the original French topography is disappearing. The Thames River was originally called La Tranche. Rivière-aux-Canards is now called River-Canard; Belle-Rivière is now Belle River; Paroisse Saint-François is now, St-Francis Parish; Pointe-aux-Roches is now called most frequently Stoney Point.

In spite of this, there remains in the hearts of many French-Canadians a strong desire to preserve their identity and the values of their three-hundred year-old cultural community. They have always considered schools and parishes as bastions of survival for their community.

In education, there has been significant and continued progress in recent years. Thirty years ago, there were no publicly funded French-language secondary schools in Ontario. There was even a provincial law forbidding the use of French in all secondary schools, including those attended by French-Canadian students. Today, there are four French language secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario, one of which was established just recently.

At the elementary school level, because of increasing interest in bilingualism, there has been an influx of children of English-speaking parents with French-Canadian family lineage.

On the media front, French language radio and television is available and perform valuable services to the community.

At the parish level, however, the situation is very different. The availability of French language religious services is constantly diminishing. Except in Paroisse Saint-Jérôme in Windsor, the vast majority of parish activities are in English only. And the downward trend continues. Just recently, the Diocese announced that there would no longer be a French mass in Rivière-aux-Canards, or should we say, River-Canard.

And now there is another threat to the French-Canadian community in the region: the loss of an important part of its architectural heritage : the churches of Saint-Joachim and Pointe-aux-Roches.