





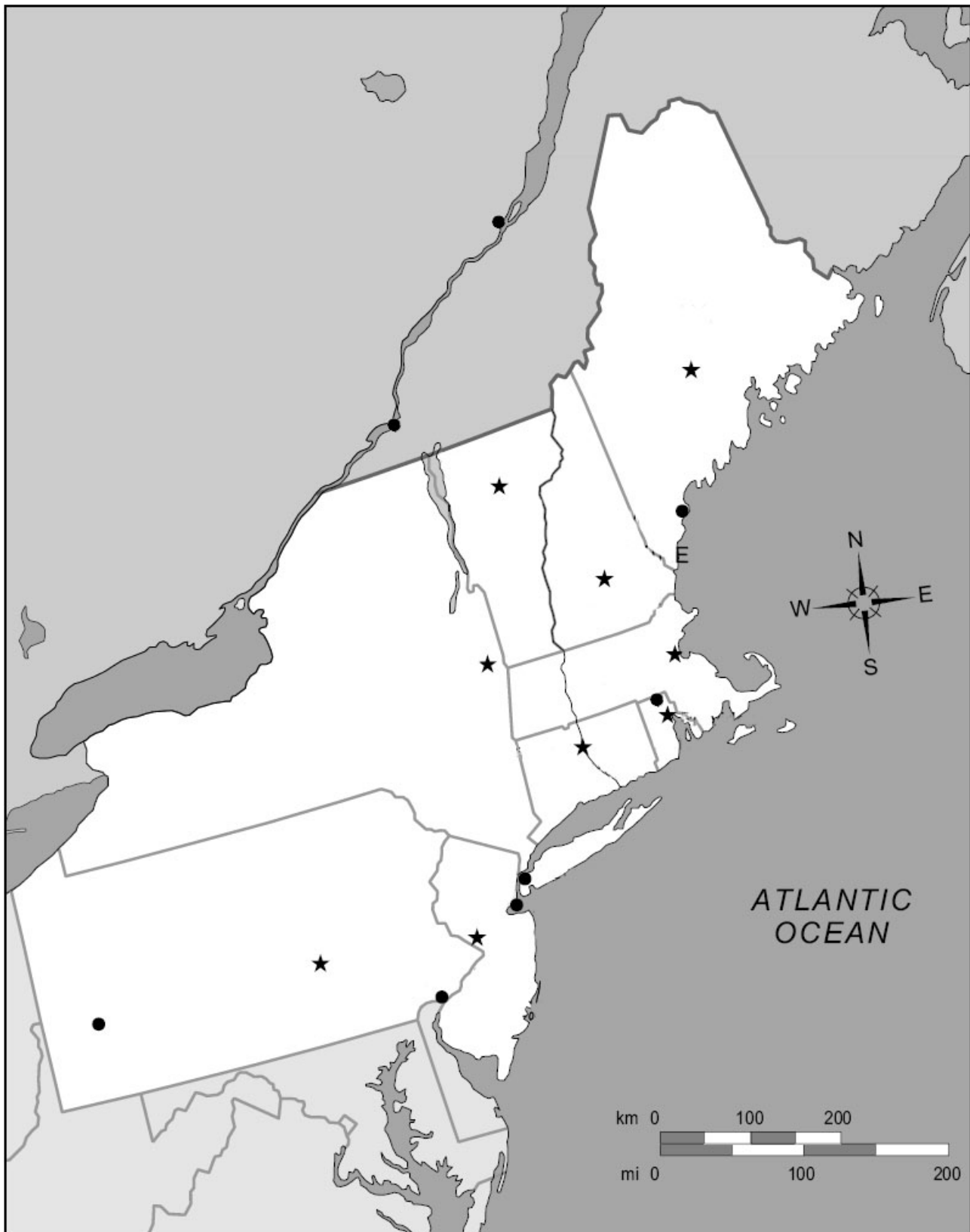








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## The Decision to Leave

By Raymond H. Bacon

(A script for the farm house at the Museum of Work and Culture)

The time: 1900

The place: St. **Raymond**, Quebec

### The Opening Scene

Opening Scene: Early in the morning in rural Quebec (possibly in the village Of St Raymond.) A young girl (her name is Louise) opens the door of the farmhouse, stretches her arms, yawns and greets the day. As she is awakening she slowly looks about to the right and to the left. Upon observing the figures to her left she speaks to herself.

**Louise:** What a beautiful day! I see Papa in the field. As usual he was up before the sunrise and is already working. He must be so tired. Look at Ti Paul he must have been told that he has to help with the planting so he did not go to school. And Maman she is spinning the wool. I do hope that she makes me a pair of warm mittens for next winter. Oh those winters, it seems that as soon as the warm weather returns the cold winter is already waiting to come back.

(From around the corner **Simone** (Louise's sister) appears: She is about the same age as her sister and the two exchange morning greetings.)

**Louise:** Ah Bonjour Simone, you're up early this morning

**Simone:** Ah yes. I had to feed the chickens and gather the eggs for breakfast.

**Louise:** Did you sleep well last night?

**Simone:** Finally yes, but it took me a long time at first. I could hear Maman and Papa talking for quite a while. At times they were talking very loud.

**Louise:** Me too. I'm very concerned about what they were talking about. They seemed to be arguing with each other.

**Simone:** I know. It's the fault of Jean Boisvert and his ideas about going to work in the States.

**Louise:** Papa thought that he would like to go but Maman was not very happy about leaving

## The Agent

**Simone:** That Jean Boisvert, did you know that he now works for some of the mill owners in Woonsocket? He calls himself an agent and recruits workers for the mill owners. He thinks that he's so important now that he lives in the States. He even changed his name to John Greenwood. Just who does he think he is?

**Louise:** Well I don't know Simone, he seems like a good enough person. Did you notice how well dressed he was? He bought that suit in the States you know. And did you see that gold watch he was wearing? I think that's because he has a good job in Woonsocket.

**Simone:** I think he wears that because it's part of his job. He wants to look prosperous. His job is to come back here in Quebec and hire workers for those mill owners. I don't think that he always tells the truth about life in Woonsocket. I'm sure that life there is not as easy as he describes it. Imagine, he tells us that we could earn more money there in a month than we can earn here in a year. He even said that we can earn more money than we can spend. That's very hard to believe.

**Louise:** Maybe it is ...but his speeches at the village square sound good. Did you notice how many people signed up to work after the harvest last year?

**Simone:** That may be true. ..but not all of them made it to Woonsocket. Remember the time when the workers were on the tram and were on their way to Woonsocket? How angry he was when another agent from another place, Fall River I think, offered them a better job there, Jean was fit to be tied when he lost almost half of his workers not to mention his commission.

**Louise:** That's true, but most did make it to Woonsocket and are still there.

**Simone:** I feel sorry for them, because they are in danger of losing their language and their faith.

## A Question of Language and Faith

**Louise:** From what you say, I guess you believe everything that Monsieur le Cure preaches from the pulpit.

**Simone:** Louise! Don't talk like that! Of course I believe Monsieur le Cure. He is an educated and holy man. He is concerned about our souls. He sees what is happening almost every Sunday after Mass. Many of the parishioners are selling their furniture and household goods in order to go to the States. Their houses are boarded up and they leave.

**Louise:** Are you saying that when they leave they will no longer practice their Catholic religion?



**Simone:** Life in the States is not like life here in Quebec. Over there there are many cities filled with all kinds of people who speak only English. When that happens to a Quebecois it almost surely means that his religious ways will soon follow.

**Louise:** How can you say that?

**Simone:** Remember what Sister Marie Rose used to tell us at school? "He who loses his language, loses his faith."

**Louise:** (*In a fairly loud voice*) Voyons donc Simone do you really believe that? Sister only said that to frighten the children.

**Simone.:** Not so loud Louise. The younger children are still asleep. You don't want to wake them. And while we are talking about the children, what about if they have to go to school in Woonsocket. They will learn new things and forget all about their language and their heritage.

**Louise:** Don't worry about that. When our neighbors, the Bousquet's, came back from there last year their daughter, Pauline told me that there are new schools in the parishes where sisters from Quebec teach in French.

## Factory Work in the States

**Simone:** Well, I don't know about that, but if it's true it's a good thing. The other thing that bothers me is working in those factories we hear about.

**Louise:** I'm not worried; after all, we work hard here on the farm. I'm not afraid of work.

**Simone:** But it's different in those factories. Last week the people in the village store were talking about a letter they received from their relatives in Woonsocket. It told about how work is in those factories. They said that all day long, for more than twelve hours you have to stand in front of a noisy machine. You can never leave until the workday is done. Some say that the work is also very dangerous. Some people have lost their arms when they got caught in those machines. They also hire children to do this work. I can't see Ti Paul, little Marie and the others doing this. I don't think I'd like that kind of work Louise.

**Louise:** I'm sure that it's not that bad. Oh those people in the village store all they do all day is gossip, talk politics and play checkers. Don't believe everything they say. Instead think about the money that we can make if we move to Woonsocket.

**Simone:** That's all you can think about Louise. I don't think that that would make us happy. Look at us here on the farm. We are a happy family aren't we? We are together. That's important to me.

**Louise:** That may be true, but every year it gets worse. You know what Papa said last fall. Every year we get less and less from the farm. The harvest has been poor for the last four years. He said it's because the land is not as rich as it used to be. Some day it will no longer be able to support us. Look at what happened to Baptiste's family. They lost their farm and had to go to the states to earn a living.

**Simone:** I'm sorry you brought that up, Louise; you know how much I liked Baptiste. I know that some day he will return and maybe buy his own farm.

**Louise:** That's wishful thinking. You know as well as I do that many young men have left Quebec and have never come back except to visit during the holidays. When we are of age to marry who will be left for us? I'm afraid that we won't have much to choose from.

**Simone:** When that time comes I'm sure that there will be many left who are still strong and true Quebecois who are willing to stay and make a good living for their families. After all we come from a people who are hardy and not afraid of hard work. Look at Papa and Maman they are good examples of that. Remember the stories they told us about the old days in Canada. How rough it was and how the people were able to succeed. That's who were are Louise, the descendants of those early Canadians. That s why I think Papa and Maman will decide to stay here.

**Louise:** Well, I don't know what Papa and Maman will decide. I only hope that they will make the right decision. In the meantime we had better go inside and prepare breakfast. You know how hungry everybody is when they come to the table. That's one thing that we can both agree on.

## A Letter “Losing the French Language”\*

March 28, 1921  
St. Raymond, Québec

Cher Emile,

I received your letter telling me about how you liked your job and the city of Woonsocket. You know Emile that I am worried that if I go there to work I will have to learn to speak and understand English. I will find that very hard to do.

Remember when we were little and we attended the village school? The sisters told us that it was very important for us to keep our language because if we lost our French we would lose our faith. We have always been good Catholics and I would like to continue to be a good Catholic. I hope that you too continue to go to Mass on Sundays.

I have to talk to my wife, Louise, to see if we would be willing to leave our farm in order to go to the States. It is something that we have to decide together. Pray to God that we make the right decision.

Your loving brother,  
Basile

\* This fictional letter contains some true words and phrases that French Canadians actually used in their letters home.



## A Letter

### "A son in Woonsocket to his mother in Quebec"\*

May 1906  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Chère Maman,

There are many of us here who are trying to decide if we should go to work or return home to our farms in Québec. Most of us were encouraged to come here by Mr. Biosvert the agent of the mill owners. To be honest Maman, it is very hard work. We work twelve hours a day for five and one half days a week. The money is good but not like Mr. Biosvert told us. Remember he told us that we could earn more money at the end of a month than at the end of the year in Québec? He even told us we could earn more money than we could spend.

Monsieur Biosvert was very convincing when he spoke to everyone at the village square last fall. He sounded very good and the people put their trust in him. Many villagers signed up including my self.

As I told you before last fall before I left the farm, I was not afraid to work. But you said that it was different in those factories. You had heard in the village store that some had received letters from their relatives in Woonsocket. The letters told about how work is in those factories. They said that all day long, for more than twelve hours a day you have to stand in front of a noisy machine. You can never leave until the workday is done. Some say the work is also very dangerous. Some people have lost their arms when they get caught in those machines. They also hire children to do this. Now you couldn't see Ti' Paul, little Marie and the others doing this. Well, Maman, some of that is true. But as far as those people in the village store are concerned they don't know; all they do all day is gossip and talk politics and play checkers. The people here in Woonsocket are good hard working and church people.

Yes Maman they do leave. One reason is that every year it gets worse on the farm. You know what Papa said last fall. Every year we get less and less

from the land. The harvest has been poor for the last four years. He said it's because the land is not as rich as it used to be. Someday it will no longer be able to support us. Look at what happened to Baptiste's family. They had lost their farm and had to go to the States to make a living.

That's wishful thinking Maman. You know as well as I do that many families have left Québec and have never come back except to visit during the holidays. When I am of age, who will be left for me? I'm afraid that I won't find someone suitable to marry.

Well, I don't know what Papa and you will decide Maman. I can only tell you that life here in Woonsocket is not easy but it is rewarding. There are many things here that I did not even know existed while I lived on the farm. It is now getting late. I can hear the 10:30 trolley coming up the street and I can see the Opera House lights are being put out. I will have to go to bed soon because I have to get up early to work at the Social Mill. I hope that the decision you and Papa will make will be the right one.

Your loving son,  
Justin

\* This fictional letter contains some true words and phrases that French Canadians actually used in their letters home.