Finding Frank Henry Hill

Merging Three Identities using Indirect & Negative Evidence

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Introduction

Frank Henry Hill and Nellie Matilda Langevin were married in Penacook, New Hampshire, a village within the city of Concord. The following year, Nellie gave birth to their first child. In the autumn of 1908, Frank left. By February 1913, Nellie had twice attempted to divorce her absent husband, but each time, the summons was returned to the court as undeliverable. Nellie died on 26 August 1914 in New Bedford, Massachusetts, 26 years old and still a married woman. What happened to Frank?

The surname Langevin is French-Canadian in derivation, suggesting the couple may have been connected to the large population of *Québécois* who immigrated to the Northeastern United States during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.

Careful study of the family network and evaluation of indirect and negative evidence drawn from vital and census records, burial records, probate files, and newspapers provides a persuasive answer to Frank's identity.

French-Canadian Immigration

Emigration is the result of factors that both push and pull an individual into action. A convergence of these forces provided the catalyst for the immigration of nearly one million French-Canadians to the United States between 1840 and 1930.[1] On the heels of political strife in the 1830s, the entire province of Québec found itself in an agricultural

[1] Damien-Claude Bélanger and Claude Bélanger, "French Canadian Emigration to the United States, 1840-1930," *French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota* (https://fahfminn.org/ : viewed 26 Aug 2025).

crisis by mid-century.[2] Meanwhile, south of the border in New England, the booming cotton mill industry was desperate for labor after being severely curtailed during the Civil War. As the demand for textiles increased, ambitious mill managers looked north to the plentiful, and struggling, workforce available in Québec.[3] The proximity of Québec to New England and the quick and relatively inexpensive travel offered by railways created a mutually beneficial scenario for laborers and employers alike.

Even under the best circumstances, moving from one country to another may exact emotional, economic, and cultural costs. Assimilation can be especially difficult if the migrant does not share the same language, cultural, or religious traditions as those in their new home. Many French-Canadian farmers intended to return home with their earnings to improve their farms or purchase new land. Because they did not plan to remain in the United States permanently, many resisted the push toward assimilation.

However, those who remained faced struggles with Anglo-Protestant neighbors who saw the immigrants' foreign language and Catholic customs as a threat. The newcomer's desire to fit into their adopted country conflicted with the ingrained ideology to preserve their cultural identity. This ideology, known as *la survivance* or "survival," was directed at preserving French-Canadian faith, language, and institutions – the "three pillars" of French-Canadian identity.[4] Some French-Canadians mitigated the difficulties of assimilation by anglicizing all or part of their names; some staunchly refused to change anything; and many did both at different times, posing challenges for genealogists.

Further reading on French-Canadian immigration and culture:

- Gerald J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1986).
- David Vermette, *A Distinct Alien Race* (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2018).

[2] Leslie Choquette, "French Canadian Immigration to Vermont and New England (1840-1930)," Vermont History 86:1 (Winter/Spring 2018), p. 3.

[3] David Vermette, *A Distinct Alien Race* (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2018), pp. 98-104.

[4] Gerard J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 65.

Lewis Wickes Hine, photographer, "6 P.M. Amoskeag Mills, Manchester, N.H."; digital image, *Library of Congress (https://www.loc.gov/resource/nclc.01803/ : viewed 26 Aug 2025).*

Naming Customs

In keeping with *la survivance*, French-Canadian naming practices were deeply rooted in Catholicism. Until the mid-20th century, many children were given three names at baptism: a first "first" name of Joseph or Marie, after the Holy Family; a second "first" name reflecting the personal name of their godparent of the same sex; and a third "first" name, which would be the child's personal name. Choice of this personal name often followed guidelines from the Roman Catholic Church, which stipulated that children be given the name of a saint who would be their role model and guide throughout life. Records did not always include all three names, so it is not unusual to find only one or two first names in the baptismal register but three names in other sources. People often used combinations of their forenames throughout life.[5]

Another potential challenge in determining identity among French-Canadians was the use of a *dit* name. *Dit* ("dee") names, or "call" names, developed in a culture where given names were often repeated multiple times in extended families, necessitating a way to

[5] Sandra Goodwin, *French Language Lifelines for the Anglo Genealogist* (Leicester, Massachusetts: Goodwin Genealogy Productions, 2020), pp. 21-23.

differentiate people. A secondary family name based on a trait, a geographical location, an occupation, or other attributes, could help differentiate between same-named individuals in a community. *Dit* names could be passed on for generations, and offspring could opt to keep their *dit* name as a secondary family name, use it as their primary family name, fluctuate between the two, or use them both in sequence.

However, a note of caution: since *dit* names were often based on attributes or places which many people shared, the same *dit* name could apply to unrelated people. To further complicate things, members of the same family may have taken different *dit* names based on their home or some other attribute. Some family names have many dit names associated with them.[6]

Examples of *dit* names:

Surname	**Dit Name**	**Surname**	**Dit Name**
Lorange, Loranger, L'Orange	Cluseau, Cluseau, Clusieau, Cluso, Cluzeau	Lamontagne, Delamontagne, Montagne	Banhiac
	Michelon		Banliac
	Range, Rangé, Rangers, Renger		Bacquet
	Sanguine		Baquest
	Cluseau		Desnoyers
	Després		Jeremie
	Gey		Lalue
	Rivard		Martel
	Maisonville		Pont
	Guilmat		Bagnac

For more reading on French-Canadian names, see:

- Goodwin, Sandra, *French Language Lifelines for the Anglo Genealogist* (Leicester, Massachusetts: Goodwin Genealogy Productions, 2020).
- Picard, Marc, *Dictionary of Americanized French-Canadian Names* (Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 2013).
- Institut généalogique Drouin, "French-Canadian 'dit names' and nicknames," blog, 5 June 2019, *Généalogie et histoire du Québec*

[6] Goodwin, *French Language Lifelines for the Anglo Genealogist*, pp. 12-15.

(https://www.genealogiequebec.com/blog/en/2019/06/05/french-canadian-dit-names-and-nicknames/ : viewed 12 Sep 2025).

- Institut généalogique Drouin, "Denomination in old Quebec," *PRDH-IGD* (https://www.prdh-igd.com/en/noms-et-prenoms : viewed 12 Sep 2025).

Lists of known *dit* names:

- "Le LAFRANCE," database, *Généalogie Québec* https://www.genealogiequebec.com/LAFRANCE/name-nickname-associations/ : viewed 12 Sep 2025), subsection "Name-nickname associations of LAFRANCE."
- "Name-Nickname associations," database, PRDH-IGD (https://www.prdh-igd.com/en/noms-et-prenoms : viewed 12 Sep 2025).
- "French-Canadian Surnames: Variants, Dit, Anglicizations, etc.," *American-French Genealogical Society* (https://homepages.rootsweb.com/~afgs/index1.html : viewed 26 Aug 2025)
- *Family Names and Nicknames in Colonial Québec* (https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~unclefred/genealogy/DitNames.html : viewed 26 Aug 2025)

Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS)

The Genealogical Proof Standard is a framework developed by the Board for Certification of Genealogists® to ensure the reliability and credibility of genealogical conclusions. It consists of five core components, each of which are broken down into more specific standards:

- Reasonably exhaustive research – Seeking all pertinent evidence that could answer the research question with emphasis on original records
- Complete and accurate source citations – Recording pertinent information about a source so that other researchers could replicate the search and find the same evidence
- Thorough analysis and correlation of evidence – Comparing and testing evidence, sources, and the theories derived from them, to determine which are likely to be correct and which are not
- Resolution of conflicts – Using evidence quality, corroboration, and reasoning to resolve items of conflict when possible. Not all conflicts are able to be resolved.

- Soundly reasoned written conclusion to explain the findings.[7]

More in-depth discussion of the GPS may be found:

- Jones, Thomas W., *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013), chapters 3-7.

Evidence Types

Direct evidence – *Directly* answers a question on its own. It answers a research question without the need for support. A death date on a death certificate is direct evidence of when a person died.

Indirect evidence – *Indirectly* answers a question but must be considered in combination with other information. If the mother of the research subject is not found on any record pertaining to them, but her name is found in the marriage record of a known sibling, that provides indirect evidence that the subject has the same mother. This evidence must be correlated with evidence of the sibling relationship to provide the answer to the question.

Negative evidence: The absence of expected information itself answers a question. Like indirect evidence, negative evidence must be combined with other information to support the conclusion. For example, if a child stops appearing with their family in the census, that is negative evidence that the child may have died. Again, this would have to be combined with other evidence, like their absence from a parent's will, to support the theory.

It is important to note that negative evidence is *not* the same as negative search results. A negative search is simply the absence of relevant information. For example, the lack of a marriage record for a couple who lived in the early 1800s would not be interpreted to mean that they were never married.

For more information on evidence types, see:

- Jones, Thomas W., *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013), pages 13-16, "Categories of genealogical evidence."

[7] Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, Second Edition Revised* (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry.com, 2021), Chapter 1, "The Genealogical Proof Standard."

- Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, Second Edition* (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry.com, 2021), Standards 37-50, "Reasoning from Evidence."

The FAN Network

The FAN Network, or FAN Club, is a concept and a research strategy that encompasses the people who surrounded an ancestor in time and place.[8] This network includes:

- **F**riends, including relatives, in-laws, and extended family
- **A**ssociates like colleagues and business partners, fellow parishioners, and others who shared connections with the ancestor, and
- **N**eighbors, people who lived nearby or in the same community

When we are unable to locate records for our person of interest, records of the members of his FAN Club may uncover direct or indirect information about him. For instance, an ancestor may appear as a witness on a deed for his neighbor's property.

Other Resources

- "New Hampshire City and Town Annual Reports," digital collection, *University of New Hampshire Scholars Repository* (https://scholars.unh.edu/nh_town_reports/ : viewed 26 Aug 2025).
- *American-Canadian Genealogy Society* (https://acgs.org/ : viewed 26 Aug 2025).
- Online Library and Photograph Catalog, *Manchester Historic Association* (https://manchesterhistoric.org/catalog-holdings/ : viewed 26 Aug 2025). Collection includes Amoskeag Manufacturing Company records, Manchester School Register Collection, and thousands of photographs.

[8] Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, Second Edition Revised*, p. 13, Standard 14, "Topical Breadth."