

## [William Green]

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[1938-9?]

Maine

Living Lore

Old Town - 1

PERSONAL HISTORY OF WILLIAM GREEN, FRENCH CANADIAN

William Green, French American. Lived in Canada when young, but born in Van Buren in 1883. 75 years old. Lives with his wife and married son, Adam, who is their only child.

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The couple did adopt a child named Florence about forty years ago. Florence, who was about four years old when she was [adopted?], was one of about ten children who had been brought to the church from some orphan asylum. The custom of bringing orphan children here ( and to other parishes as well, I suppose) was followed for several years. Married persons whom the parish priest thought would make satisfactory foster parents were allowed to adopt one of the children. Florence, although she wasn't French, was brought up a Catholic and spoke French. She attended the convent school. She worked in a local dry goods store when she was about sixteen. She was very good looking and a very good [girl?]. Every one, including Mr. and Mrs. Green, thought she was an orphan, but when she was eighteen her bona fide parents turned up with proofs of their claims. The Greens didn't like to give her up but the choice was finally put up to Florence and she reluctantly choose her actual [parents?], and returned to Massachusetts with them. Mrs. Green cried when she left.

Mr. Green came to Old Town to live 40 years, ago in 1880, but he had been here before at different times to work. He worked in the Portsmouth Navy Yard at Portsmouth, N.H. for a year just before he came to Old Town to stay. He went to school in Van Buren about six years when he was a child. Can read and write in both French and English. He had a pronounced accent when he first came to Old Town but that has entirely disappeared. He could speak English when he came here. He used to work a lot here as a brick and stone mason. His boy, Adam, worked with him. Is a good Catholic. Mr. Green is about 5 ft. 10 inches tall, slightly stooped, tanned, white hair. His mind is quite clear, but he seems to be growing weak. He used to talk so that any one could hear him half a block away. His son Adam does odd jobs. Worked on the WPA last winter. Was working in Basin Mills on the foundation of a house last fall and slipped breaking a bone in his leg. Said he slipped down a little bank not over a foot high. Had his leg in a cast for a month and fears he will have to go back to the hospital to have a piece of cartilage removed. Adam used to work as a painter in the E.M.White canoe shop. Three of the canoes he painted while there were displayed in the window of a local drug store about 20 years ago. The coloring

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scheme was very unusual and original. The design on one showed life size dragon flies, on another the design was drifted autumn leaves in natural colors. I thought of the ogher other design yeasterday, but it has slipped my mind for the time. On the bow of each canoe the pattern was utilized to form the artists name. The name didn't show up plainly, but it was blended into the design. The canoes excited much favorable comment.

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1

### THE LIFE OF WILLIAM GREEN, FRENCH CANADIAN

(as told by himself to Robert F. Grady) Mr. Green: "Well, I'm afraid there isn't much that I can tell you. I wasn't born in Canada, you know. No. In Van Buren in 1863." Mrs. Green: "He had been here before he came here to stay. We lived in Canada a while, too." Mr. Green: "Yes, work was bard to get up there, then, and they didn't pay anything. The pay wasn't so awful good here, but any one could get by on it and there was always a job. I could speak English before I came here. I worked in the woods, in the woolen mill, and in the saw mills. I did a lot of mason work, too, on sidewalks, buildings, and foundations. I worked on the church (St. Joseph's) when they were building that. I was out in Portsmouth, New Hampshire a couple of years in the shipyard. I used to get \$1.25 a day in the saw mill and we worked twelve hours a day. We lived over on the island (French Island) when we first came here. We had a big space for a garden then, so you can see there was a lot less people lived there then." Mrs. Green: "We paid \$6.00 a month over there and there were five roams in the house. I think a rent like that would cost about \$10.00 now. Food was a lot lower in price then, too." Mr. Green: "Yes, we used to buy flour at \$4.00 a barrel. Food was pretty cheap in Canada, too; that is, everything except flour. That was \$12.00 a barrel. Flour was always high there. Wood was \$4.00 a cord (in Old Town). I forget what potatoes were, but they were pretty cheap."

2

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Mrs. Green: “When we came here the best meat was 15 cents a pound. I used to get eggs for 8 cents a dozen. Milk was 6 cents a quart, butter was 15 cents a pound, and lard and sugar were 5 cents. Mr. Green: “We used to buy it in big wooden tubs instead of in pound packages.” Mrs. Green: “Tea was 50 cents a pound in Canada when we lived there, and sometimes they sold it in fancy boxes. I have one of those boxes now that we got up there filled with tea for 50 cents. Will you get that box, Alice?”

(I had mentioned to them that photographs of curios, etc., were desired to illustrate the book that was to be published. The tea box proved to be about 5 inches wide and deep, and about 7 inches long. It had a hinged cover and a clasp in front. It was light tan in color and seemed to be made of split bamboo and woven reed. It was very cleverly constructed. After the box had been duly admired, I asked Mr. Green about a Frank Wedge who lived across the street.) Mr. Green: “Frank? Oh yes. He's a French Canadian. He's a foreman down at the pulp mill. Works outside all the time. Has a small crew of men under him. They go around doin' carpenter and repair work for the mill. He built that new carrier they have there. Pretty smart for a fellow seventy-eight years old. He doesn't get through until four o'clock.

“D'ya know I ought to be gettin' that pension. Yes sir, I'm seventy-five. I never asked for it and may be they wouldn't give it to me, anyway, on account of the house, here. But that has always belonged to my wife.”

3

(The conversation got around to Wedge again, and I remarked that the name didn't sound French.) Mrs. Green: “That is the English of it. In French it would be coin . Mr. Green: “Yes, Green wouldn't be called a French name, either. In French it would be Grenier. I always had to explain how that was spelled, so I started to use the English way of it. The lawyer up here couldn't spell it.”