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## **French History in Your City: San Jose, California - the Pellier Brothers**

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by Glenn Davis

### **Introduction**

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In 2011, the In Grave Danger Gang, a group of historians on the lookout for historical headstones from Santa Clara County, was searching for the grave marker of Louis Pellier (1817-1872), the “Prune King”, from Saint Hippolyte, France. He and his brother Pierre brought over cuttings of “la petite prune d’Agen”<sup>1</sup> from France that became the dominant crop in the Santa Clara Valley. In another part of town, a farmer named Lee Lester had saved a headstone that someone was using for target practice.<sup>2</sup> The name on that stone was Louis A. Pellier (1858-1873), the nephew of Louis. On the bottom was written: “Adieu anfan chéri”, meaning, “Goodbye, dear child.” The Gang brought the two stones together, after being apart for over 70 years, and put them in a cemetery in San Jose, in memory of the Pellier family from France.

A headstone can teach us about the past, about origins. Ancestors can be honored with them. Headstones are one way we practice public history. Public history describes the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world, such as through monuments, documentaries, museums, headstones, letters, etc. This practice of public history helps to make connections between the past and the present and teach local history, as students not only can read about a person like Louis Pellier in a book, but they can see and touch the headstone, the park, the picture, etc.

The headstone also provides students with an opportunity to learn French. They can start by studying the French written on the headstone. Students can then read about his origin in France, following up with research of his hometown and region.

Other avenues of research may be pursued, such as finding the local history section of libraries in the area. Local universities and historical societies will often have experts who can point you in the right direction of where to find the information that you are looking for.

You will most likely find primary resources written by pioneers in their mother tongue, which will be an excellent teaching tool from which your students can learn. I was able to find journals written by French pioneers to California put into book form. These can give insights into the cultural differences between life in France and life in their new home. There were newspapers written in French that were printed in San Francisco. This is another source from which we can glean interesting data. Of course, in any of these French

resources, the French language can be studied. Also, the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings can also be compared with more modern writings.

As with any person in history, one can study their family: their ancestors, as well as descendants. Studying family vocabulary and culture is an important part of any French curriculum. Much can be learned from genealogical research using United States and French records, including Census records. A good amount of this research can be done online. A good, free source for international genealogical research on the web is [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org).

In this unit, we will focus on Louis Pellier, his journey from France to the Santa Clara Valley, why he came, and his significance to the agricultural industry in California. We will look briefly at the spread of the French language around the world, then narrow in on the migration of the French to North America and California in the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily as part of the Gold Rush. Finally, we will specifically study Pellier and the French coming to San Jose, California. Our research will take us deeper into the Pellier family history, including a geographical study of their French origins. We will also look at the plum/prune industry in more detail. The French language will be used throughout the unit in class discussions, internet research, and some French primary source research. Students will write up their results from their research, as well as conduct their oral presentations in French. The students will be discovering how they can learn about the past from their everyday surroundings, such as museums, libraries, street signs, and even tombstones. French will then become an integral part of historical research and engagement with the language will enliven history and inspire students to pursue further research.

## Rationale

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I teach French at a public high school in East San Jose, California called William C. Overfelt High School. It is one of the poorer areas of the city, in a rough neighborhood where one can find gang activity. The average family income is considerably less than the average income level for all families living in Santa Clara County. According to the school's data from 2013-15, approximately 92% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch programs. It is part of the 11-High School East Side Union High School District. Out of 1,455 students, 375, or 26% are English Learner students. Approximately 80% are Latino, 15% Asian (including Filipino), and about 2% African American.<sup>3</sup> Most French students begin their French studies during high school. This unit will be given to a combined class of students in their third year of French (French 3) and students in Advanced Placement French Language and Culture. Class discussion and teaching will be in the French language about 90% of the time.

This project will be done over a 4-week period during the months of September and October. Students will have 4 days of French per week, one of which will be a block period of 95 minutes. The other three will be 55-minute periods.

The textbook for the French 3 class is Valette and Valette's *Discovering FRENCH Today!* There is not a strict curriculum that is mandated by our district. One goal is to prepare the French 3 students to be able to succeed in the AP class the next year. Another goal is for students at both levels to become much more fluent when speaking French. This is why the class will be conducted mostly in French. Presenting their research orally to the class, without reading a script, will also go a long way in improving their oral fluency.

They will constantly be working on the National Standard of Communication in their speaking and their writing. Of course reading French is also very important in learning the language and being able to communicate it well. We will be able to read and study primary source documents in French, such as French newspapers printed in San Francisco in 1853, books written in French in the 19<sup>th</sup> century describing pre-gold rush and post-gold rush life, and 19<sup>th</sup> century letters written in French. The students will learn that they could actually put their French to use locally, by possibly helping to translate some of these documents that have been passed down to museums and historical societies. Using numerous types of resources helps engage the students in the interpretation and writing of history while giving them an opportunity to increase their grammatical accuracy.

Culture and Comparisons are two more Standards that drive the student's learning in this unit. There will be many opportunities to observe and compare francophone cultures, historical and contemporary, to the current American culture. To prepare students for the AP test, they need to be listening to a lot of French by a variety of people to improve on their listening comprehension. Students will be listening to French reports online about the plum/prune industry, and hopefully, listen to a guest speaker in French, a descendant of the Pellier brothers. They will also be using other resource types such as literature online articles, and a short, online movie about the Pellier brothers. Although this movie and some good sites to research will only be available in English, they are valuable and important sites, which help researchers to better understand Louis and Pierre Pellier. Much of what was written on the subject of the Pelliers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or later, has been in English and cannot be ignored if one wants a more complete picture of these men.

The AP students look at six different themes throughout the year: Families and Communities, Science and Technology, Personal and Public Identities, Global Challenges, Contemporary Life, and Beauty and Aesthetics. We will touch on the Families and Communities theme in this unit as we research the Pellier family and the community of San Jose. We will be looking at the movement of the French language in order for the students to better understand where French is spoken and why and how it got there. This language migration would come under the theme of "Community." We will look briefly at the way prunes are prepared in order to get a better understanding of what Pellier's small business eventually became. The preparing and packaging of prunes would fall into the Science and Technology theme. Personal and Public Identities would cover topics such as Louis Pellier as a historic figure, while the information about how the Pellier brothers are remembered today through local public history projects such as the park, the grave stones, in books, etc., would be part of the Contemporary Life theme.

This unit will not be a lot of names and dates on tombstones. This is local history. It is a desire to know about these people, the French settlers, who spoke the French language right here in San Jose, California and the events that took place a long time ago. Discovering these answers and more, makes it much more real to us, linking us to the past. It also makes learning French much more interesting, as we learn about these French immigrants and their descendants. There will also be the possibility of meeting actual descendants of the Pellier family.

The community can be our laboratory for learning. It is also about preserving the past, our past. The story brings us to explore outside of our school's immediate surroundings to East San Jose, less than three miles from Overfelt High. During this unit of researching the French in our area, students may develop a desire to learn about their own past, their own immigration story, connecting not only their French studies and San Jose history, but their family and San Jose history.

This could be adapted to another local situation using someone from France who immigrated to your area.

Local history libraries and librarians, as well as Census records could help you find local French immigrants and develop a similar unit combining local history with French language instruction. The unit could also be adapted to other World Language classes, such as Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, German, Italian, etc.

The French have traveled and settled in far corners of the earth throughout the last few centuries, bringing with them their language. A great reason to learn French is to be able to go around the globe and communicate with the approximately 200,000,000 people in roughly 50 countries.

## Content Objectives

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My students will begin this unit researching the migration of the French language from France in the 1500's to countries and dependent entities around the world. They are familiar with some areas where French is spoken. But this work will open their eyes to just how vast the francophone world became in the last 400+ years.

The French language spread to several countries neighboring France, such as Belgium, Switzerland and Luxembourg. In the early 1600's, the French overseas empire was being formed. This colonization brought the French culture and language to parts of nearby countries like England and Italy, as well as across the Atlantic Ocean to Canada, several Caribbean Islands and French Guiana in South America. From Canada, more specifically, Acadia, (Nova Scotia and Québec), the French speakers were forced out, and many ended up in Louisiana in the United States. Also in this period, the French built and sustained a slave trade in the Caribbean and in French Guiana, as well as Gorée Island off the coast of Senegal, West Africa. The French also established colonies in Réunion off the coast of southeast Africa, in parts of India, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Saint Barthélemy and Egypt.

In the early to mid-1700's, the French language became very well respected throughout many European countries. A popular term was the "universality of the French language". However, in the latter part of the century, the English language would become the supreme language in the world.

In 1794, the initial stages of "Assimilation" began. This was the concept based on the idea of expanding French culture to the colonies outside of France in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>4</sup> Natives of these colonies were considered French citizens as long as the culture and customs were adopted. It became the ideological basis of French colonial policy. The French colonized islands in the south Pacific, China, southeast Asia, such as Cambodia, Korea, Japan, Laos and Vietnam. Africa became a popular target for colonization for France, in such countries as Algeria and Tunisia in the north, Djibouti in the east, as well as several countries in West and Central Africa and Madagascar. In France at this time, it was believed that their language was "superior" to "primitive languages". Jules Ferry, a leader in French colonial expansion, was clear that there was a great difference in races, also, stating, "...the superior races have...the duty to civilize the inferior races."<sup>5</sup>

Through continued colonization, the French language continued to be spoken in more African countries in the 1900's as well as Vanuatu in the Pacific, Syria and Lebanon in the Middle East. France has even "staked out" small sections of Antarctica for research.

Back in North America, French explorer Jacques Cartier travelled the Saint Lawrence River in Canada in the 1530's and 1540's. Many of the early French settlements were trading posts. Jean Ribaut was sent from

France in 1562 to establish a colony in Florida for French Huguenots. He did establishments there and in South Carolina, but they only lasted a short time. In 1608 Samuel de Champlain established the first permanent French settlement in Quebec.<sup>6</sup> Those who left were mostly explorers, traders or Jesuit missionaries. The French spread out to the Midwest to the Great Lakes area and the Mississippi River Basin. They started French bases in Detroit and St. Louis. Robert Cavelier de la Salle founded Louisiana in 1682 after traveling the length of the Mississippi River. Jean-Baptiste Bienville formed a successful French colony in New Orleans in 1717.

Many of the French that came to Canada, emigrated for religious purposes. During the Reformation, many protested against some of the doctrines and corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Thousands of these Huguenots left France for North America beginning around 1538, but many came after 1685, when the Protestant religion was outlawed in France. Huguenots settled in areas such as New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, and Massachusetts.

Some French came to the United States as refugees during the French Revolution of the late 1780's. A large wave of French immigration began after Napoleon's defeat in 1815 and lasted until the 1860's. A record number of French immigrants, 30,000, came during the California Gold Rush of 1849-1851. According to the article "French Americans," by Laurie Collier Hillstrom, many French immigrants came to the United States as individuals or families seeking change or economic opportunity.<sup>7</sup> Between 30,000 and 40,000 French came before 1820, and 77,000 during the 1840's.<sup>8</sup>

In the area of present-day California, a significant population of French was being established. Some came via Québec, Canada, and were mainly trappers. Canadians settled in the town of French Camp, in California's central valley, just south of Stockton. French whalers arrived in the Carmel area before 1848, when the land was part of Mexico. Many French families settled in the area in the 1850's when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill. Thousands of French arrived during this time. 20,000 came in 1851 alone. Most did not get rich from gold. However, a number of them ended up settling in the Santa Clara Valley, in what is now San Jose.

The French Canadians were very attracted to California gold, and usually paid a great price: deprivation, curse, famine, "mains tachées de sang pour protéger son 'or maudit'..."<sup>9</sup> Following a similar theme is a popular Québécois song:

“Écoutez, je vais vous chanter  
Une chanson de vérité,  
En vous parlant de Californie  
Triste de pays. Ah! De l'ennui!  
Ah! Faut-il donc our de l'argent  
Quitter sa femme et ses enfants!  
Pour une si courte vie  
Hélas! Quelle folie  
Quand l'heure de la messe arrive

Dans les saloons nous les voyons

Au jeu de cartes, à boire, à rire,

Ah! Faut-il donc pour de l'argent

Quitter sa femme et ses enfants!

Pour une si courte vie

Hélas! Quelle folie.<sup>10</sup>

Several Frenchmen arrived in the San Jose area at this time and eventually made a name for themselves, including Pierre Sainsevain (1844 - miller, wine, carpenter), Pierre Vignes (1844 - winemaking), Antoine Delmas (1849 - winemaking), François Lallemand (1849), Louis Prévost (1849 - nurseryman), Pedro de Saisset (1849 - business), Pierre Pellier (1852 - fruit, wine), Etienne Thee (1850 - wine), Charles Lefranc (1850 - winemaking), Edward Auzerai (1850 - hotel), John Auzerai (1852 - hotel), Paul Masson (1878 - wine) and Pierre Mirassou (@1880 - wine) However, probably the most popular name of them all is Louis Pellier (1850), the "Prune King," as people often refer to him. Most of unit will focus on this man, his family, and what he and his brother, Pierre, accomplished.

Louis was born in 1817 in Saint Hippolyte, France, in the Charente-Maritime region. He was in Valparaiso, Chile, when he heard the news of the discovery of gold in California. He boarded a ship and headed for San Francisco in search of gold. He and his partner, Joachin Yocco, arrived in 1849, found a little gold, but decided to settle in the Santa Clara Valley and work the fertile land.<sup>11</sup>

Pellier arrived in San Jose in 1850 and started a nursery, called City Gardens, at a property where St. James St and San Pedro St intersect today. Louis would pay the local children a penny for each seed from a fruit tree that they collected for him.<sup>12</sup> His brother Pierre, who had arrived in search of gold in 1849, left the goldfields and joined him in 1852. In 1853, Louis paid for Pierre's return to France in order for him to bring back seeds and tree cuttings from France. Pierre did exactly that, returning in 1854. On his voyage back to California, the story goes that he put the tree cuttings in potatoes to keep them moist. And it worked.

Pierre arrived back in San Jose with two large trunks filled with seeds and scions of the very popular "petite prune d'Agen," a brand of plum grown in the southwest of France. Louis grafted these scions with the local wild prune tree to develop what would become the California plum tree. Pellier had great success with this variety. He also brought with him from France the knowledge of drying the plums, "prune" in French, to make prunes, "pruneau" in French. Pellier did not live to see how wildly successful this plum / prune would come to be. It became the number one crop in the valley for nearly 100 years. Within thirteen years, these prunes from the San Jose area were exhibited at the California State Fair. Commercial orchards began in 1870, (by many different groups, not just French settlers), and by 1900, 130,000,000 pounds of prunes were produced from 85 dried plum packing plants from all over California.<sup>13</sup>

Louis was quite involved in the San Jose area in the 1850's. He was at the first meeting of the county horticulture organization in 1853. He played an active role in the agricultural society. State fair committees were impressed by his work at his City Gardens, saying that there was "careful, skillful, and successful cultivation." In September 1861, Louis's City Gardens won many awards at the San Francisco Bay District

Agricultural Society Fair, including awards for peaches, pears and apples, as well as peach brandy, pear brandy, and peach-pit liqueur. In 1868, Louis was a judge in the fruit competition. There was not a category for prunes. Louis entered none of his products. <sup>14</sup> .

Getting back to Louis and his family, his brother Pierre returned to France a second time in 1857 and arrived in 1858 with his new bride named Henriette Renaud. Their first-born, Louis P., was born in 1859 and their first daughter, Henriette, was born in 1860.

Everything was not so wonderful for Louis Pellier and his brother. Shortly after Pierre returned for the second time, there seems to have been quite a disagreement between the brothers. Pierre ended up moving about 10 miles away in present-day Fremont, which is where he was in 1860 according to the census. It was about 1865 when Pierre moved to the Evergreen area of San Jose to take over Louis' 100-acre parcel.<sup>15</sup>

Brother Louis got married in 1861 to Constance Baube. It was a rough marriage right from the start. He would later call her a "Lucretia Borgia"<sup>16</sup> , (a woman from 1500 who was rumored to poison and murder people). The marriage caused him emotional problems. Louis eventually died in 1872, in Stockton, California, in an insane asylum. It appears that this poor marriage was directly or indirectly the major cause of his death. It is said that the only thing they had in common was that they were born in France.

Pierre soon began to grow grapes and produce wine from the Evergreen property. Pierre and Henriette's daughter, Henriette, got married in 1880 to a Frenchman named Peter Mirassou. Peter carried on the winemaking business. The family business has continued to this day (2015). It is currently the oldest family winery in the United States.

What is left of this thriving Pellier/Mirassou vineyard and winery in the Evergreen area? Besides a few streets named after some of the family members, the only physical reminder that I could find is a piece of artwork on the median of Aborn Rd., a long metal structure depicting grapes, vineyards, barrels, vintners, etc. The area is filled with houses and shops.

The history of the city's sporadic efforts to memorialize the history of Louis Pellier and his farming legacy suggests the complicated nature of public history. In the 1940's an official historic marker was placed near present day San Pedro Square, to commemorate the location of Pellier's City Nursery. However, a truck swerved off the road, destroying the historic marker. The marker was never replaced.<sup>17</sup> Some call it "The Pellier Jinx," as later on, the headstone, newly placed in the cemetery in 2011, was run over by a disoriented driver several months later.

At the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of San Jose, in 1977, some historians, (Jim Arbuckle and Leonard McKay), wanted to create a park dedicated to Louis Pellier for his work introducing the prune to California. There was a big push to raise funds to create a nice park in honor of Louis Pellier in the part of San Jose where he and his family lived and worked, on St. James St.

Pellier Park, a small park on 1/3 of an acre at Terraine and St. James Streets, was dedicated on November 29, 1977. It was only opened for a short time for the city didn't maintain it. In 1989, a drought prompted the city to cancel all plating. In 2002, The Fallon Statue was put on the corner of the park, which had dilapidated into a few barren prune trees on the small triangular lot with not a blade of grass. There were some faded plaques and abandoned shovels, with a heavy rusted iron gate that kept people from entering.

In 2005, Barry Swenson Builder was about to completely tear it down in order to put up a high rise next door.

There was a Memorandum written that year from the Director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services to the Mayor and City Council of San Jose which states that Barry Swenson Builder will “dedicate approximately 1,768 square feet of land to expand Pellier Park and to complete approximately \$1.2 million worth of improvements to renovate Pellier Park to satisfy the parkland dedication obligation.”<sup>18</sup> Swenson was to complete the park renovation by 2007. The builders were promising the city that they would restore the park after they tear it down for their high-rise building project next door.

Leonard McKay wrote in 2006 that a “tiny park was dedicated to the memory of Louis Pellier and his pivotal role in local history in 1977. He writes that it is now being expanded and completed by developer Barry Swenson as part of his adjacent building project, and the park will finally open next year.”<sup>19</sup>

It was all torn down when a high rise was put up next to it. It is currently, in 2015, just a triangular plot of grass with a sign about Louis Pellier, and a monument of someone else, Thomas Fallon. Perhaps students can show their concern by writing letters or contacting city officials to see if they can do anything to get the park project moving again.

The students will research what has been done to memorialize the pioneer work of Louis and Pierre Pellier: the park, tombstones, signs, pictures, etc. The students will research the story of the tombstones, how they went missing, how they were found, reunited and placed again in a cemetery. We will take a trip one day during the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week to visit the California Room in the San Jose State University King Library. This Room specializes in local history. There should also be some primary sources available to study. The “field trip” will also take us to “Pellier Park”, the Santa Clara University Library Archives to see the de Saisset papers, and the Calvary Catholic Cemetery.

As students research this material through the internet, they will come across a 27-minute video that was made in 1947 about the Pellier brothers called: “A Fortune in Two Old Trunks”. (There is also an 11-minute condensed version on vimeo.)<sup>20</sup> This short film, produced by the Sunsweet Company, shows the history of Louis Pellier and the prune industry in California. We also learn about the growing, drying and packing industry around 1950 in the Santa Clara Valley. We will discuss this film in class after some considerable research has already been done. Which facts about the life of Louis Pellier is fact? Was he really a failure at finding gold? Did Pierre really make just one trip or two trips back to France? How does this film portray Louis? Does he really deserve all that is credited to him? Are there other facts or details that should not have been left out? What are the aims of this short, Hollywood film?

As the students work on this project of local history, they should be critically reflecting on the whole process of displaying objects from the past. Some questions that they should ask themselves and the historians that they meet are: what should be preserved from history and why? How important was it to restore the Pellier gravestones? Is a sign about Louis Pellier at Pellier Park enough, or should there be a nice park with some prune trees? How do historians decide what to display in a museum, like the de Saisset in Santa Clara, or at the Sourisseau Academy in the King Library?

When considering displaying history, two different in situ, (in the original place), arts are used with objects of ethnography: metonymy and mimesis. The former is the art that accepts the fragmentary nature of the object and shows it in all its partiality, enhancing the aura of its “realness.”<sup>21</sup> The latter places objects, or replicas, in situ, such as a re-creative display.<sup>22</sup>

The other approach of displaying objects is the “in context” approach. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains: “In

context approaches to installation establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions..."<sup>23</sup> Examples of this are long labels, charts, diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones...booklets, catalogues..."<sup>24</sup>

## Other French Pioneers in Santa Clara Valley

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Looking for other markers of public history of French pioneers in San Jose, I took a drive to the area where French pioneers Charles Lefranc and Etienne Thee started the Almaden Winery in the 1850's, off of Blossom Hill Rd in San Jose. Besides the name of a small park named "Almaden Winery Park", a street named after Lefranc, and a sign on a long stone wall that says: "The Old Almaden Winery", there is nothing written to tell you that there was once a winery there. The Almanden Winery is California Registered Landmark No. 505. In 1988, there existed a plaque that stated: "ALMADEN VINEYARDS On this site, in 1852, Charles Le Franc made the first commercial planting of fine European wine grapes in Santa Clara County to found Almaden Vineyard. Le Franc imported cuttings from vines in the celebrated wine districts of his native France, shipping them by sailing ship around the Horn."<sup>25</sup> There is no sign of the plaque now. According to Urban Programmers "Analysis of the Historical and Architectural Significance of the Almaden Winery Site", it was recommended to preserve the winery buildings intact.<sup>26</sup> But today, nothing can be found.

Pedro de Saisset arrived in the Bay area in 1849 and served as consular agent for the French government from his home on South Market Street in downtown San Jose. He wasn't necessarily seeking gold, as so many others in California at the time, but he capitalized on the wealth around him by founding the Brush Electric Light Company in San Jose. Pedro had many real estate holdings and a 3,000+ acre ranch. Pedro and his wife Maria had four children, Henrietta, Ernest, Pierre and Isabel. The boys both studied at Santa Clara College, which became Santa Clara University. After college, Ernest studied art in Paris and Pierre studied the violin in Paris. None of the siblings had children of their own. Isabel donated Ernest's artwork to the University and founded the de Saisset Museum. She also donated boxes of documents to Santa Clara University, which are kept in the Archives section of the University library. Many letters are from Ernest writing to his father from Paris. Many are in French, some in English.

One of the most interesting French pioneers to spend time in San Jose was a carpenter named Pierre Sainsevain. He arrived in the Santa Barbara in 1839, then joined his uncle, Jean-Louis Vignes in Los Angeles to help him in the wine industry. He built a saw mill in the San Lorenzo River Valley near Santa Cruz, a flour mill in San Jose, and a schooner in which he travelled to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). He opened stores, ran vineyards, made sparkling wine, and even prospected for gold in 1848. He was a delegate to the California Constitutional Convention in 1849. He owned the building that served as the first state capitol, which was in San Jose. He was also known as Don Pedro. Things that were named after him include: Don Pedro Reservoir, Don Pedro Recreation Agency (in Lagrange, CA, near where he mined for gold), San Sevaine Lookout in the San Gabriel Mountains, and many San Sevaine streets. There are quite a few resources about him and his family at the King Library California Room.

There were many other French pioneers who settled in the Santa Clara Valley. This project will focus on those about which there are many resources available. Most of the focus will be on Louis and Pierre Pellier. Each pair of students will have a different focus. This will allow each student to learn more, as each pair of students will

share their research with the rest of the class.

Students will pair up to study the following topics: Pellier genealogy, Pellier geography, and the prune industry. Other students will study Pedro de Saisset, which will include the studying of the documents that are available at the Santa Clara University Library. Another pair of students will study Pedro Sainsevain and his life using primary resources that can be found in San Jose. Students will also study the lives of Charles Lefranc and Etienne Théé and their work in the winemaking business. I will also offer students the option to do an independent topic of their choice, if they can find the resources necessary on a certain French pioneer to San Jose.

I am hoping that offering options to choose from, each student will be able to focus on a topic in which they are interested. But no matter which direction they pursue, all students will study primary sources (books, letters, newspapers) in French. As we look at these real, historical documents, they will have to know what the French says, in order to understand what was being communicated, what the context was, why they were saying what they said, etc. Hopefully, this will make the language come alive for my students, as they will have a desire to know every word in a letter from Pedro de Saisset's son, Ernest, who is complaining about how expensive it is to live in Paris, and that he needs more money from daddy.

## Teaching Strategies

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My strategy is to use local history to stimulate students' interest and engagement with French language learning. I will use French to then get students to have deeper and unique connections to their local history.

I want students to realize that French isn't a language that is very far away and impractical. Not only is French spoken in many corners of the world, but the French and their language have come to our corner of the world in San Jose, California. I don't want my students to doubt and say to themselves, "why am I taking French?" They will learn that the French have had a significant impact in the life of the Santa Clara Valley. French is still used and spoken by a number of people in the area. (The French language and culture is promoted by the Alliance Française Silicon Valley - [www.afscv.org](http://www.afscv.org))

Archives and manuscripts in the French language can be found right in the students' backyard. They could even use their French skills to translate these old documents, which were written by pioneers of the valley. They could potentially make very interesting and/or important discoveries that could be made available to the public. Through their research, students could learn about the process of establishing some kind of public history display to represent someone or some event in the past. I hope that my students develop a love for history and a life-long love for learning. Through this project, the students will learn that anyone can have an impact in their communities, even if they are new to the area or even new to the country, as were the French pioneers.

In order for students to be focused on which direction to go in their research, or how deep to go, I will be meeting with individuals and/or groups at least once during the project to guide them in their work.

## Activities

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### The Spread of the French Language: Worksheet and Timeline

In the first week of the project, the students will begin with a quick research exercise to understand better where French is spoken around the world and little of how it spread through exploration and colonization.

I will begin the project with asking the students where French is spoken in the world. As they give answers, I will write them down, in columns. I will have a map of the world out, so they can see where, exactly, the region / country is located. When they have exhausted their own knowledge, then I will give them a worksheet / timeline to fill out blanks for countries or entities, as well as dates that the French language arrived in that area. (see Appendix) We will do a historic overview of French imperialism and migration across the last five centuries. This will help them to learn about the vastness of the francophone world.

These will be the columns:

- French is the only official language
- French is a co-official language
- French is the official language of a Dependent entity
- French is spoken in this area

Then they will individually research one country at a time to find out when French was used or officially used in that area. When someone verifies the facts with me, I will give them a candy, put it on the board, and assign them another area. When all the areas are completed, we will then have all the information we need to make a timeline and a map with pins in each area.

See the Appendix for a list of countries.

See Appendix for a chronological list of countries according to when French arrived.

### French readings of California Pioneers

While one of the objectives of this unit is to have students read resources in the French language, they will find much on-line that is only available in English. Therefore I will supplement their reading with some handouts from French authors. One resource is a French newspaper from San Francisco called *Echos du Pacifique*, Jan. 12 and 14, 1853. Unfortunately, the print is not very clear from the picture I took of the pages at Yale University Library. I will show them a few pictures in order to look at some of the headings and discuss them.

Daniel Lévy's book *Les Français en Californie*, 1884, has some great pages to look at and discuss. On pages VIII and IX in the Preface, Levy talks about why he wrote this book, "...j'ai essayé de reconstituer le passé de notre colonie et de l'exposer, de mon mieux, dans cette série d'esquisses, imparfaites sans doute, mais tracées avec une scrupuleuse bonne foi."<sup>27</sup> On pages 14-16, Lévy writes about the "other side of the coin" for those who found gold. He is talking about the exorbitant prices of some of the necessary thing needed, such as food, transport, blankets, bottles in which to put gold powder, etc. He describes the difficult existence of the miner: bad food, nights out in the elements, fatigue, excessive work, and sickness.<sup>28</sup>

In his conclusion, Lévy talks about how French immigration can succeed: to have a useful profession, the strong will to use it, and to learn the language of the country. In public life, the French identify themselves with the American population. But in their private life, if you penetrated into the interior of their homes, it's like you would find yourself in France itself: furniture, books, newspapers, etc.<sup>29</sup>

In Edwin Bryant's book *Voyage en Californie*, on pages 39-43, he describes San Jose in detail during a trip in 1846. He talks about the fertile plain, population, buildings, animals, orchards, cabarets, playing cards, weather, the Santa Clara Mission, etc.<sup>30</sup>

Also the students will be discovering primary documents written in French in the 1800's, which have been archived at Santa Clara University and San Jose State University. These letters or notes can be the most direct and reliable link to an earlier time. Sometimes the only traces of events or individuals are found in photographs or cemetery markers.<sup>31</sup>

### **The French Pioneers of San Jose - Worksheet**

Using computers in class, the students will then begin their research on the French in San Jose. We will also touch on the history of San Jose, as well as the economics, labor and immigration in the area. They will share their discoveries near the end of the first week, such as names of French settlers and good websites used to find the information. It could be interpreted as a sort of competition to see who can find good websites quickly, as we share our findings with one another, after giving everyone enough time to find something.

After about a half dozen names have been listed, I will guide them to focus in on the Louis and Pierre Pellier, Pierre de Saisset, Pierre Sainsevain and Charles Lefranc. The students will turn in their top choices of what topic they want to study, then I will pair them up. At this point, I would give them a worksheet with some fairly specific facts to research concerning "their immigrant." For example, I would like them to find out about who they were, where they came from, why they came, their family, their work, how they have been memorialized, and any interesting stories behind any of these facts. The students would finish off the second week by writing up a first draft, including a list of the resources that they used, plus other resources that they have seen cited, but that they couldn't find. This would allow me to see what they have been able to find and not find, and also to see what kind of help they need in writing.

### **Class visit by historian and Pellier descendent combined with City tour**

The second week of the project would include a city tour, including a visit by a historian to come in to share with the students about primary source documents and how to find them, and to answer any questions that they might have. A second visitor that I would have come in would be an actual descendent of the Pellier brothers. Ideally, this would be a descendent who speaks French, so that the students would have the opportunity to hear more French and work on their listening skills. The plan would be to have the students meet a local historian, Charlene Duval, and a Pellier descendant at the Sourisseau Academy, next to the California Room in the King Library at San Jose State University.

The tour would include a trip to the Calvary Catholic Cemetery to see where the Pelliers and other French pioneers are buried, a visit to the Archives and Manuscripts at the Santa Clara University Library to mainly see 19<sup>th</sup> century French letters of the de Saisset family, visiting Pellier Park, where the Pellier brothers used to live and work, seeing where Louis Pellier has been painted at the entrance to the San Pedro Square Market, and the California Room and the Sourisseau Academy in the San Jose State University King Library, where students

can research old documents and photographs of the French pioneers of San Jose, as well as meet a historian and a Pellier descendant. The students will see how the pioneers have been memorialized as we take a tour around San Jose. Reflecting on commemorating and preserving the past will also be a part of this unit. Students will critique how the Pelliers have been remembered.

We will use the local bus system to visit the following places:

- Calvary Catholic Cemetery on Alum Rock Rd
- Santa Clara University Library Archives and Special Collections
- Pellier Park
- San Pedro Square entryway
- San Jose State University King Library Sourisseau Academy / California Room

### **Translation of a Document**

It is my hope that my students will not only develop a deep desire to learn through this unit, but also understand that they could play a role in preserving history through some physical means, such as writing, recording, photographing, building a monument, etc. With their knowledge of French, they could actually help the local historians translate the many documents that have been left to the historical societies. This would help many people who do not understand French, to understand what has been communicated in these documents.

Students will research French letters and documents from other French pioneers in California that have been archived in the libraries at San Jose State University and Santa Clara University. They will each photograph one, study it and try to translate it into English. This will show them how they can use their French knowledge right here in their own city to help the community understand about life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Research Paper**

Another objective for the unit will be for the students to write a 3-page double-spaced typed paper on the results of their research. The contents will include the arrival of the French in California, their search for gold, their settlements, etc. Students will read some 19<sup>th</sup> century French texts to learn about life in that era for the French. This could be an insight into cultural differences and the French way of life.

They will turn in a first draft after two weeks of preliminary research, noting resources that they have used, and others that they have learned about, but not physically found. Seeing their work early will help me to guide them to resources and also help them with their writing skills, such as using the past tenses of the “passé composé” and the “imparfait”, as well as other grammar issues that come up.

### **Pellier Family**

The students will have split up to research different topics in more detail. Some will study the Pellier family, studying Census records, books, web sites, and some primary texts to make a family tree for Louis and Pierre Pellier. I will explain to them, in French, how I grew to have a love for history research through what I discovered about my grandmother while in Antwerp, Belgium. The family history research skills that I show them will be useful as the students try to research the Pellier family and how one could actually find descendants of historical figures. This would include the family relationships and how they got along.

### **Pellier Origins**

Others will study Louis's tombstone, gleaning information from that. They should discover the spelling error, then research the actual origin of Louis Pellier, where Saint Hippolyte is actually located in France. The students will learn the geographical terms such as: "region", "department", "arrondissement", "canton", and "commune". They will create maps to clarify the locations. This would include the story of the tombstones.

### **Prune Industry**

Others will research the plum / prune industry, learning from French videos about the process of growing, harvesting, treating, testing, and preparing the prune for consumption. This will include the work that Louis and Pierre did in San Jose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Pierre Mirassou**

Another pair of students will study the son-in-law of Pierre Pellier, Pierre Mirassou. They could focus on the Mirassou family and their winery, the oldest family winemaking business in the country.

### **Pierre de Saisset**

A fifth pair of students will study the French pioneer Pierre de Saisset. They will be able to use the primary sources found in the Santa Clara University Library Archives.

### **Pierre Sainsevain**

A sixth pair of students will study the life of the French pioneer Pierre Sainsevain. This could include some of his activities outside of San Jose, since they were many.

### **Charles Lefranc**

Another pair of students will study the work of winemaker Charles Lefranc and his business partner Etienne Théé. They established the Almaden Winery in the Evergreen area of East San Jose. They will research the origins of the winery, as well as the recent history, trying to discover how the old winery has been or has not been memorialized.

### **Oral Report**

Throughout the unit, the students will be hearing and listening to French as I speak to them as a group and individually. The speaking piece of the project will be worked on often. Over many weeks, they will be practicing describing pictures, including historic photographs of the Pellier family and of San Jose, so that when they present their research to the class, they should not have too much difficulty talking about what they are showing. They will be speaking for at least four minutes, using 10 slides or pictures or a family tree, etc.

The fourth and final week would be for the students to finish up their projects and to present their discoveries, using visuals, such as posters, power point presentations, bulletin board displays, family trees, etc.

With a bit of research, I am sure this unit can be easily adapted to many other high school contexts. Immigrants from France, Germany, Spain, Vietnam and other areas have made important contributions to

their new homeland. Not only can it be adapted in other World Language classes, but I'm sure that history classes around the country, perhaps the world, could make good use of this unit, particularly as they study immigration.

## Resources

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## Appendices

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### Implementing District Standards

Our School District follows the Common Core Standards, but since these are written with the English language in mind, I will show how this unit will be relevant to the National Standards for Foreign Language Education, developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Students will be engaged in French conversation, expressing feelings, interpreting written language, and presenting ideas to listeners on a variety of topics in French. (Communication Standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied, as well as between the products and the perspectives of the culture studied. (Culture Standards 2.1, 2.2)

Students will demonstrate the understanding of the nature of the language and culture through comparisons of the French language and their own cultures. (Comparisons standards 4.1, 4.2)

### Worksheets:

### D’Autres Pays

*Seule Langue Officielle Date Une des Langues Officielles Date*

## D'Autres Entité

*Entité Dépendente (Langue Officielle) Date Langue Utilisé (Pays) Date*

### List of countries where French is spoken

<i>Only Official Language</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Co-official Langugae</i>	<i>Date</i>
France	1539	Belgium	1830
- Guadeloupe	1635	Burundi	1916
- Martinique	1635	Cameroon	1920
- French Guyana	1624	Canada	1605
- Mayotte	1841	CAR	1894
- Réunion	1664	Chad	1900
Mali	1898	Comoros	1886
Niger	1922	Djibouti	1884
Burkina Faso	1896	Equatorial Guinea	1983
Côte d'Ivoire	1893	Haiti	1664
Senegal	1904	Luxembourg	1804
Guinea Conakry	1898	Madagascar	1896
Dem. Rep. of Congo	1885	Rwanda	1916
Congo	1886	Seychelles	1756
Gabon	1886	Switzerland	1815
Togo	1920	Vanuatu	1906
Benin	1892		
Monaco	1861		

<i>Dependent Entities</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Spoken in:</i>	<i>Date</i>
French Polynesia	1842	Algeria	1830
New Caledonia	1853	Mauretania	1904
Aosta Valley, Italy	1539	Morocco	1911
Jersey, UK	1515	India (Pudach.)	1674
Guernsey, UK	1515	Egypt	1798
Saint Martin	1679	Lebanon	1920

Wallis and Futuna	1887	Cambodia	1863
Saint Barthélemy	1763	Laos	1893
Saint Pierre et Miqu.	1815	Mauritius	1715
Fr. Southern & Antar	1955	Vietnam	1884
Louisiana, USA	1699	S. Africa	?
		Israel	?

### The Spread of the French Language / Colonization of the French: A Timeline

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Independent</i>
1515	Guernsey, Jersey (Channel Islands)	
1539	France: official language of France: Edict of Viller-Cotterêts	
1539	Aosta Valley, Italy (on and off French)	1814
1605	Canada – Port Royal, Acadia (Nova Scotia)	
1608	Canada – Quebec: a language of government	
1624	French Guiana	
1624	Senegal (Goree)	
1635	Guadeloupe	
1635	Martinique	
1650	Saint Lucia	
1664	Saint Domingue (Haiti)	
1664	Réunion (Ile de Bourbon)	
1673	India (Chandernagore)	
1674	India (Pondichery)	
1679	Saint Martin (part of island is overseas collectivity of France)	
1699	United States – Louisiana	
1715	Mauritius (Ile de France)	
1723	India (Yanam)	
1725	India (Mahe)	
1739	India (Karikal)	
1756	Seychelles	
1763	Saint Barthélemy (sold to Sweden)	1784
1798	Egypt	1801
1804	Luxembourg	
1815	Switzerland	
1815	Saint Pierre et Miquelon (overseas collectivity in 2003)	
1830	Algeria	
1830	Belgium	
1841	Mayotte	
1842	French Polynesia: protectorate	
1853	New Caledonia	
1854	Port de France (Nouméa)	
1858	China	1860?

1861 Monaco (from Italy)	
1863 Cochinchina	
1863 Cambodia	
1866 Korea	1868?
1866 Japan	1868?
1878 Saint Barthélemy (repurchased it, became Overseas Collectivity) 2007	
1881 Tunisia	
1884 Vietnam	
1884 Djibouti	1977
1885 Democratic Republic of Congo (by Belgium)	1960
1886 Republic of Congo	
1886 Gabon	
1886 Comoros (protectorate)	
1887 Wallis and Futuna (French Protectorate)	
1887 French Indochina	
1892 Benin (Dahomey)	
1893 Laos	
1893 Ivory Coast	1960
1894 Central African Republic	
1896 Madagascar	1960
1896 Burkina Faso (Upper Volta)	1960
1898 Guinea	
1898 Mali	1960
1900 Guanzhouwan	
1900 Chad	
1904 Mauretania	
1904 Senegal	
1906 Vanuatu (with Britain)	
1911 Morocco	
1916 Burundi (by Belgium)	
1916 Rwanda (by Belgium)	
1920 Syria	
1920 Lebanon	
1920 Togo	
1920 Cameroon	
1922 Niger	1960
1955 French Southern and Antarctic Lands (Overseas Territory)	
1983 Equatorial Guinea (year?)	

### Worksheet on French Pioneer Research

Nom du pionner français \_\_\_\_\_

Sa famille:

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Son voyage et arrive:

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Son travaille:

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Sa mort:

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Comment est-il immortalisé?

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Pourquoi est-is immortalisé?

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D'autres informations intéressantes:

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## Notes

1. In French, "prune" is the word for plum, and "pruneau" is the word for prune. Agen is the region in France from which the plum came.
2. Interview with Ralph Pearce, July 31, 2015.
3. "School Profile." *William C. Overfelt High School*. <http://www.wcohs.schoolloop.com/SchoolProfileb>
4. "Assimilation." Wikipedia. Accessed July 26, 2015.
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6. Laurie Collier Hillstrom, "French Americans," <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/French-Americans.html>.
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. "blood-stained hands to protect his cursed gold." Sophie-Laurence Lamontagne, *Canadiens français et Québécois en Californie*. (Québec: Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2002) 26.
10. É.-Z. Massicotte, "Nos chansons historiques : la recherche de l'or en Californie", *Bulletin des recherches historiques*, 148. General translation: "Listen, I will sing to you a song of truth, speaking to you about California, sad country. Is it necessary to leave one's wife and children for money! For such a short life, what foolishness. When the hour of the mass arrives, we see them in the saloons, playing cards, drinking, laughing. Oh, should one leave his wife and kids for money!? For such a short life, what foolishness!"
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