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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the General Assembly are proud to designate a section of Interstate 57 that encompasses an area where the first non-Native Americans in Illinois settled as the "French-Canadian Heritage Corridor"; the majority of settlers in the area were French-Canadian pioneers who immigrated in large numbers to what is now Kankakee and Iroquois Counties from the late 1820s to 1850s; those settlements included Bourbonnais Grove (now Bourbonnais), Le Petit Canada (gone now, but the site is located in the Davis Creek area of Kankakee River State Park), Rockville (gone now, but the site is located in the northwest section of Kankakee River State Park), St. George, L'Erable, Papineau, and St. Anne; after the Potawatomi, the first significant ethnic group to make contributions in the Kankakee area were the French-Canadians; and

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WHEREAS, The French were no strangers to the heartland of North America; as early as 1543, France established the colony of New France, which eventually covered about half of the North American interior; the nineteenth-century French-Canadians were very familiar with the land south of the Great Lakes; they knew about Rene-Robert Cavelier Sieur de la Salle's (1643-87) quest to explore the rivers of New France that flowed into the Mississippi; he and 33 men made a portage from the St. Joseph River to a marshy river's headwaters; in 1679, the party

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1 continued paddling into the "Great West" along a new  
2 "connecting river" with 8 canoes; the party eventually  
3 completed the journey from Montreal to the mouth of the  
4 Mississippi; La Salle named the "connecting river" between the  
5 St. Joseph and Illinois Rivers, the Seignelay, in honor of  
6 colonial minister of France; the name was later changed to the  
7 Theakiki and is now called the Kankakee; the native Potawatomi  
8 called the land adjacent to the river "Te-yar-ac-ke"  
9 ("wonderful land"); the word "Ky-an-ke-ke" evolved; some  
10 Indian tribes called the land "Te-ok-e-kee" ("wolf") while some  
11 coureurs de bois (French "runners of the wood") used the name  
12 "Quin-que-que"; and

13 WHEREAS, The Kankakee River Valley of the Illinois Country  
14 was sparsely settled until Noel Levasseur (1799-1879) began  
15 recruiting settlers from his native Quebec Province, Canada;  
16 hundreds of French-Canadians soon came to settle and farm along  
17 the fertile Kankakee River in an area they called Bourbonnais  
18 Grove-extending from today's Kankakee River State Park to Cobb  
19 Park in Kankakee - an area 12 miles long by 1 mile wide; at the  
20 age of 19 in 1817, Levasseur was employed by the American Fur  
21 Company (headquartered in Astor, New York with a recruiting  
22 station in Montreal) along with his friends Dominique Bray,  
23 Henri Boucher, and 15-year-old Gurdon Hubbard (1802-86); after  
24 the Black Hawk War of 1832, Levasseur and Hubbard purchased  
25 land from the Potawatomi and opened the Chicago to Danville

1 Road through the Grand Prairie along the Kankakee River (now  
2 Route 102), and the Hubbard Trail which Illinois highway 1 now  
3 follows; in the late 1820s and early 1830s, 2 other notable  
4 French-Canadians joined Noel Levasseur in the settlement along  
5 the Kankakee: the brothers Francois Bourbonnais, Sr. and  
6 Antoine Bourbonnais "Bourbonnais Grove" was named after them;  
7 and

8 WHEREAS, By 1846, there were at least 22 French-Canadian  
9 families living in Bourbonnais Grove; the records of St. Leo's  
10 Parish in Bourbonnais Grove (later to become Maternity of the  
11 Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Bourbonnais) in 1847 noted 77  
12 French-Canadian families or 471 people; when Canadian-born  
13 George Letourneau (1831-1906) - destined to become a renowned  
14 statesman - arrived in Bourbonnais Grove in 1848, he attended  
15 church at St. Leo's Chapel, a wooden structure which had been  
16 built in 1841; a new church (Maternity of the Blessed Virgin  
17 Mary) replaced the chapel in 1849; this was the church in which  
18 Letourneau was married to Elodie (Langlois) Letourneau in 1852;  
19 it burned to the ground in 1853; work began 2 years later on a  
20 new church to be constructed of local limestone; construction  
21 was completed in 1858; over 150 years later, Maternity of the  
22 Blessed Virgin Mary Church appears much the same as it was back  
23 then; and

24 WHEREAS, George Letourneau became mayor of Bourbonnais in

1 1875 and mayor of Kankakee in 1892; he was present at the first  
2 Illinois State Republican Convention in Bloomington in 1856,  
3 and listened to Abraham Lincoln's "Lost Speech" - this  
4 reference denotes the few notes taken by the audience which was  
5 spellbound as Lincoln delivered an impassioned condemnation of  
6 slavery; the address was the precedent for his famous "House  
7 Divided" speech delivered in Springfield on June 16, 1858;  
8 Letourneau served in just about every Kankakee County political  
9 office, and was elected State Senator in the Illinois 38th and  
10 39th General Assemblies from 1892 to 1996; and

11 WHEREAS, French-Canadian priests and brothers of the  
12 Viatorian Order and French-Canadian nuns of the Congregation of  
13 Notre Dame were instrumental in the religious and educational  
14 development of the Bourbonnais Grove community; in the later  
15 part of the nineteenth-century, girls attended the new Notre  
16 Dame Convent and School after it was built in 1862; boys were  
17 instructed by the Viatorian priests and brothers in the  
18 Bourbonnais Grove public school and then St. Viator Academy  
19 after 1868; young men could attend St. Viator College when the  
20 Viatorians were granted a university charter in 1874; when  
21 Letourneau became mayor of the Village of Bourbonnais, when it  
22 was incorporated in 1875, the community was already a thriving  
23 educational center; a new boy's school, another St. Viator  
24 Academy, was built in 1891; and

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1           WHEREAS, The French-Canadians Noel Levasseur, George  
2 Letourneau, and Captain Francis Seguin spearheaded the  
3 organization of Kankakee County in 1853; the new county had a  
4 population of 8,000 people; the population would soon shift  
5 from Bourbonnais to Kankakee with the arrival of the railroad  
6 in 1853; Kankakee was originally platted as the "town of  
7 Bourbonnais" in 1853; 2 years later, the name was changed; the  
8 population of Bourbonnais Township in 1850 was 1,720 with 81%  
9 or 201 out of 248 families of French-Canadian descent; other  
10 French-Canadian settlements in Kankakee and Iroquois Counties  
11 were St. George (1848), L'Erable (1854), St. Anne (1851), and  
12 Papineau (1872); and

13           WHEREAS, At about the same time as the formation of  
14 Kankakee County in 1853, Canadian-born Father Charles Chiniquy  
15 (1809-99) was pastor of Maternity Blessed Virgin Mary Church in  
16 Bourbonnais Grove; after disagreeing with the Bishop of Chicago  
17 over the bishop's treatment of Catholics in Chicago,  
18 particularly French-Canadians, Fr. Chiniquy led an exodus of  
19 Bourbonnais Grove French-Canadian Roman Catholics to the  
20 village of St. Anne; this crisis split many French-Canadian  
21 families; older French-Canadians in the Kankakee area still  
22 today resent Fr. Chiniquy's schism; Fr. Chiniquy was  
23 excommunicated in 1856; he then left the Roman Catholic Church  
24 and formed the Christian Catholic Church of St. Anne; and

1           WHEREAS, Up until the 1950s, French was a primary spoken  
2 language in Bourbonnais; French-Canadian family names still  
3 abound in the telephone book, and the fleur-de-lis is the  
4 symbol of Bourbonnais - as the village symbol and all street  
5 signs testify; therefore, be it

6           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
7 NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we  
8 designate a section of Interstate 57 as the "French-Canadian  
9 Heritage Corridor" with one sign located on 1-57 for southbound  
10 traffic just north of the Manteno exit 322 and another sign  
11 located on 1-57 for northbound traffic just south of Ashkum  
12 exit 293; and be it further

13           RESOLVED, That the Illinois Department of Transportation  
14 is requested to erect 2 signs on a section of Interstate 57,  
15 consistent with State and federal regulations, giving notice of  
16 the name, "French-Canadian Heritage Corridor", with one sign  
17 located on I-57 for southbound traffic just north of the  
18 Manteno exit 322 and another sign located on I-57 for  
19 northbound traffic just south of Ashkum exit 293 by July 15,  
20 2015.