

Chez Nous

The newsletter of

La Société

Canadienne Française du Minnesota

Juillet-Août 1999

P.O Box 581413, Minneapolis, MN 55458-1413

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Ellie at age 4

Eleanor Corey remembers this photo: "My big sister, Helen, 24 years old, brought me in from the play yard, gave me a bath in the galvanized tub, combed and parted my hair just right. The long brown stockings were put on as well as the brown buttoned shoes. Then, woe of woes, Helen carefully slipped a red scratchy wool dress over my head. It was very important that the small ring with three ruby chips showed on the middle finger of my left hand, and that the right hand be posed just so. In spite of the terrible itchy feeling that wanted desperately to be scratched, I had my picture taken. Big sister Helen was proud of me, and the red dress came off soon enough."

JE ME SOUVIENS...

A Family Story

by Eleanor (Ellie) Corey

My name is Eleanor Emily Lemire Corey. I am unequivocally French with two sets of grandparents whose ancestors came from France, over to Québec, then south to Minnesota and Wisconsin, respectively. In those early days, French married French and Catholic married Catholic. In talking to each other, it was often heard, "He married a nice French girl," or "she married a nice French boy." It was likely assumed that they were Catholic. The same was true of other nationalities and religions. My

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A Note from the Editor: This issue, the first in Volume 21, brings together a wonderful team who have never met each other, live on opposite sides of the United States, and are both cousins of our founder John Rivard! And John had nothing whatsoever to do with bringing them together!

Catherine Rivard, of Concord, Massachusetts, has agreed to assist in the artistic portions of *Chez Nous*, and the new look is as created by her. In February, she sat down at her computer and designed a number of different alternatives to our masthead, which has lasted essentially unchanged for the last 17 years. She brings a delightful fresh look to our publication. Her memories of *La Société* appeared in the 20th anniversary edition. In fact, she edited the very first issues of *Chez Nous*.

Ellie Corey, an absolutely delightful friend from Cottage Grove, Oregon, is a "serendipity acquaintance". A friend who knows I do *Chez Nous*, met Ellie at a wedding in Oregon in August of 1998, gave me her e-mail address, and the rest is history. Her delightful memories make up this issue of *Chez Nous*, and are a reminder that all of us live in and through our stories, and that stories like hers richly deserve being written and shared!

— D. Bernard

parents were the last generation of those who held such strong ethnic beliefs. Not one of their 13 children married French, and but a few married Catholic.

I smile when I think about my beautiful ancestry and I'm very grateful that somewhere back there, someone blessed me with good genes and with enough intelligence to compose this paper.

The Lemire Family, As Shared in Stories

It is sometimes given to the youngest member of a family to hear and listen to the stories the older ones tell. The stories can either be stored in memory and lie dormant there, or they can be recalled, sometimes in bits and pieces, to be told again. A word, one word, comes to mind and triggers memories as I remember them in 1999.

HICKORY, is the word. It was a word often used by my parents as I grew up.

Hickory was not a nut nor a tree, but a place, unique to Ben and Eleanor Lemire (my grandparents) and their family. It was the home place: land settled near Aitkin, Minnesota, the county seat.

In the early 1800's two Lemire brothers, Ben and Jonas, came down from Canada as young men. Jonas settled on land near Range, Wisconsin, across

the Mississippi River not far from Stillwater and St. Paul, Minnesota. There he built a sturdy two-story brick house where he raised his family and farmed his land. This house still stands.

Ben, with his bride, Eleanor, settled on land near Aitkin, Minnesota. They chose a spit of land between two lakes, Spirit and Hickory. They too built a large two-story house, but of wood, instead of brick. Wood was in plentiful supply for their building needs. Fortunately, it was a spacious house for they soon had a family of seven sons and three daughters. One son, George, was my father. Ben made a living for his family by logging, farming, fishing, hunting, and harvesting maple trees for syrup when the sap ran in the early spring.

A small area in the front of the house was sectioned off and became the local post office.

A shelf in the living room was built so it could be let down and used to say Mass whenever a priest came by. Later, when two of the sons became priests, the shelf would be utilized by them when they came home on vacations.

Half a mile or so from the house and down the road, they built a one-room schoolhouse. A mile or more from the house in the opposite direction, on a knoll overlooking the two lakes, was a cemetery. It seems everything they needed was on their spit of land.

Continued next page



Hickory House

To the young girl listening to the family stories, Hickory was the green grass, tall trees with branches heavy enough to hold a swing, and it was the heady scent of planted roses. It was stories of where the cousins coasted on their homemade sleds all the way from the schoolhouse door, past Grandma's house, over a bridge to their own homes. It was stopping by Grandma's or by one of the aunts' houses for cookies or fresh baked bread. It was where mischievous boys swung on the large black maple sugar kettle until it fell and a large piece broke away. The broken kettle leans against the sugar bush even today.

It was where a young mother hanging clothes on Grandma's clothesline was confronted by young curious Indian women from across Spirit Lake. It was the sound of their ancient chanting and beautiful singing as it drifted over the water on a quiet summer evening.

It was fishing in the summer and through the ice in the winter. It was where a young daughter contracted whooping cough, died and was buried on the quiet knoll overlooking both lakes. The older sister had to give up her new shoes so her little sister could have them on her feet for the burial.

Hickory was memories in my parents' hearts.

This is what they talked about whenever family made those rare visits across Dakota to our house on the prairie. After a meal, and there was always a meal, the dishes would be cleared and a large box of photos would be hauled out from under my parents' bed and placed on the long plank table.

Now the memories began to flow, back and forth: cousin Matt who had stinky feet; Uncle Gene with the spittoon; Aunt Edna who could quilt even though she had only one hand, and on and on.

And the youngsters listened, as the stories were told all over again about their home place, Hickory.

It was said of Ben that he was a strict disciplinarian, while Eleanor was a kind and loving mother. They were both firm about family prayer, especially the daily rosary. Ben's rosary is an awesome thing, taking up room in one of my dresser drawers because I fell heir to it. The rosary measures approximately four feet long (if stretched out) including the crucifix. The large beads that were black have been worn down in places almost to the original wood, and the cross, the same. This was serious praying!



George and Evelina Lemire, October 10, 1901

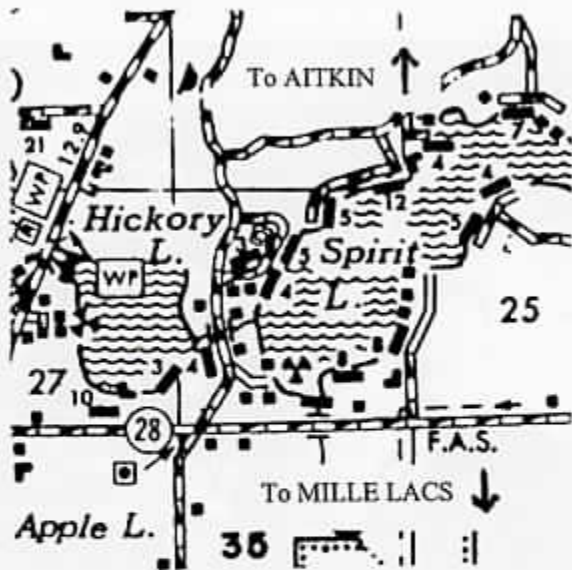
Most of Ben and Eleanor's sons built houses near that of their parents when they married and started families of their own. George, my father, was one of the exceptions. He had heard of land being offered in the Dakotas and was determined to avail himself of some. He could envision turning his land into golden wheat fields, which indeed became the name of his North Dakota county, Golden Valley county.

A New Family Begins

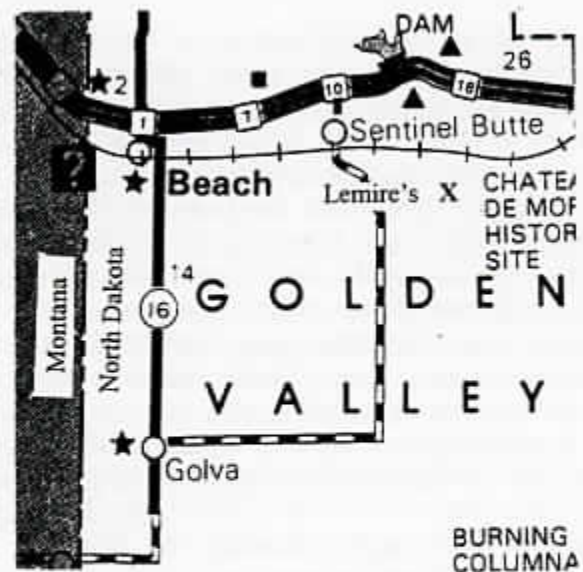
George was 26 years old when he married my mother, Evelina Marie Parent, who was 16. They married October 10, 1901, in Aitkin. They lived at Hickory for the first five years of their marriage before heading west. Evelina learned many practical skills from her mother-in-law, such as cooking, preserving food, sewing, gardening, and child care, and she always spoke of her "other mother" with affection. In

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The Hickory area, near Aitkin and Mille Lacs, Minnesota



The area settled by Ellie's parents in western North Dakota

fact, when I was born, she named me Eleanor, after her.

Evelina was born in Somerset, Wisconsin, into another branch of the Lemire family. Her mother's name was Emily and from her, my other grandmother, I was given my middle name. Emily was left a widow with five young children, of which my mother was one. When word came that help was needed at Hickory, Evelina, a strong young woman, was encouraged to go. There she met up with the seven handsome Lemire boys, and chose George, the one who played the fiddle. They married and made plans.

Making Plans to Leave Hickory

Free land! Beautiful words, and all he had to do for ownership was till the land and show development. To a young man with a wife and two children, a young man filled with ability and ambition, it meant everything. Indeed, George Lemire could envision his dreams becoming a reality: a place of his own on which to rear his family, with a wife, Evelina, to share his dream.

George and Evelina had been living with George's parents in Hickory and it was long past time to strike out on their own. The golden opportunity of homesteading on the prairie in western North Dakota was their answer and they decided to go for it. They

must not have worried about what they were getting into: the desolation, extreme weather of the prairie, the distance from family and friends. Nor would they have anyone with whom to speak their native tongue, which was the French language. They would be the only settlers at that time in the southwestern part of North Dakota who were of Canadian French origin. Worries about the future were not a concern in the present.

Excitement lay in land ownership and establishing a home. They were young, and "Laughing George", as he was sometimes called, was a dreamer. It had been his infectious smile and charm that had won 16-year-old Evelina's heart as she danced with him and his brothers there in Hickory. He was the love of her life and she was bound to him forever.

George liked nothing better than to hunt, fish, dance, play his fiddle, and make love to Evelina, yet he had skills which would do him well on the land he planned to develop. He had worked in a lumber mill and had become proficient enough with carpentering tools to build sound structures at Hickory in his teen years. He could also mend machinery, care for animals, and handle a plow; all essential skills for a beginning farmer.

Evelina, a tall, handsome, healthy, strong woman, was, even at her young age, prepared for the tasks as a homemaker. Besides caring for her children and George, she could sew, keep a tidy house, cook,

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Nouvelles Villes Jumelles

Newsletter of La Société Canadienne Française Du Minnesota

SAVE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

LaSociete C-F du Minnesota
Calendar of Events for 1999-2000

1999

October 11 (Monday 7 p.m.)	Canadian Thanksgiving Potluck
December 3 (Friday 7 p.m.)	Christmas Party
December 24 (Friday, 7 p.m.)	Christmas Eve Mass in French at St. Louis

2000

March 6 (Monday, 7 p.m.)	Mardi Gras Potluck
May 4-7 (Thursday-Sunday)	St. Paul Festival of Nations
June 5 (Monday, 7 p.m.)	Annual membership meeting
June 23 (Thursday, 7 p.m.)	Annual fete du St. Jean-Baptiste at Henry Sibley House, Mendota
May, June or July	Club Trip to somewhere (Ideas/Help???)

Chez Nous Deadlines (issue date approximately two to three weeks later)
The 15th of the months of August, October, December, February, April and June.

Members of the 1999-2000 Board of Directors of La Societe C-F

President:	Dick Bernard 7632 157 th St W #301 Apple Valley MN 55124 612-891-5791 dbernard@nea.org (after August 1, dbernard@educationminnesota.org)	Board	Sera Byrne 902 Lincoln Avenue St. Paul MN 55105-3150 651-224-2636
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Treasurer	John England 2002 Palace Ave St. Paul MN 55105 651-699-5178		

This is your Club, and it's success depends on your active support. Help us preserve the heritage we love in any way that you can, from articles and photos for the newsletter (to Dick Bernard), to donations, to attending and helping with activities. If we all pitch in, we will succeed. Merci.

Red Lake County

AFRAN Chautauqua and French Festival

Consider attending the AFRAN Chautauqua and French Festival at Old Crossing Treaty Park August 28-29, 1999.

There will be excellent foods as always, but this year a host of expert chefs from Vancouver to Roseau will cook off culinary specials all weekend, including an additional brunch Sunday morning. There are now two brunches, one at the Benoit farm 4 miles from the park and one at the park. Bon appetit.

Features for thought include: "Cafe' Metis," with humanities specialist Greg Gagnon, Saturday from noon-1 p.m. "Cafe' Africain," with Mathieu Koffi, specialist in economic development from the Ivory Coast, Sunday from noon-1 p.m. Both cafes encourage discussion of history and culture stemming from our metis history and our historic tie with French-speaking Africa. Families who hosted Africans in the Red Lake Falls area 33 years ago will have a reunion during Cafe' Africain to be hosted by Benoit and Koffi and others.

Developing understanding of our historical and cultural partners continues with ideal individual and family weekend programs featuring: the Turtle Mountain junior fiddlers and dancers; Native American flute music and stories with Chuck Littlecreek of Red Lake and Ann Dunn of Cass Lake; French-Canadian music with George Beaudry and Wilbur Hollnagel, stories with Delorme, O'Brien and Newson, voyageurs in quantity with their performances and crafts.

All weekend, a Michif and a voyageurs encampment offer the opportunity to mingle, meet and talk.

Consider joining the AFRAN and

Old Crossing legacy of meeting, talking and trading.

Children's activities include hands-on workshops both afternoons. How about doing a dream catcher with Bob Hesslund on either Saturday or Sunday, either in the morning or afternoon?

How about meeting, talking or trading with participants in "Arts and the Land," a group of persons who participated in a series of workshops sponsored by Acts Across Minnesota. They are painters, puppeteers, storytellers, writers, beadworkers, a flute maker, a dream catcher maker and potters. They will be present all weekend.

Along with the food, cafes, weekend features, children's activities, workshops, humanities and arts programs, you may want to know about the following specials.

• Thursday, August 26, 6:30 p.m., Lafayette High School in Red Lake Falls, Ruth Waukazo will give a talk on surface embellishment with Anishinabe beadwork. At 8 p.m. the same day at the same place, Alfred Fortier will speak on French-Canadian history and genealogy of the Red River Valley.

AFRAN's mission in the Red River Valley is to create an understanding of the world's French heritage through the arts and humanities, thereby enhancing the quality of life through respectful forms of meeting, talking and trading.

• Friday, August 27, 9 p.m. at Old Crossing, bonfire with stories, music and songs.

• Saturday, August 28, 5 p.m., at shrine across from Old Crossing, Rev. Tim Bushy will offer a religious service.

• Saturday, August 28, 6:30 p.m., there will be presentations on the theme of AFRAN and the Old Crossing legacy.

• Saturday, August 28, 9 p.m., at the Red Lake Falls American Legion hall, Dean Bernier and Sandra Sawatzky public dance with instruction on dances and music.

• Sunday, August 29, 6:30 p.m., at Old Crossing under the big tent, Ann Dunn will present Native American stories: a legacy of learning.

For a complete and detailed schedule, please contact AFRAN, Box 101, Red Lake Falls, MN 56750 or telephone, 218-253-2270.

The above events are sponsored by AFRAN (Association of the French of the North) and Arts Across Minnesota from the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota Legislature and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Minnesota Humanities Commission in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature, the Northwest Regional Development Commission through funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board and Minnesota State Legislature, the Red Lake County Commissioners, Red Lake County Historical Society and members of AFRAN.

and of more importance, she knew how to preserve food, a skill which would keep them fed through the winter months. She had no intention of helping in the fields, seeing that as "man's work". She and George were partners as well as helpmates with the understanding that Evelina would work in the home, and George would do the outside work.

In the fall of 1909, George made the journey to North Dakota to choose his land and finalize his claim. He then remained in North Dakota long enough to get things ready for the following spring when he would return with his family. He rented a team and wagon in Sentinel Butte, the town 12 miles north and west from his claim. He filled the wagon with enough lumber to build a large, one-room house. Evelina had heard stories about settlers on the plains who lived in sod houses "like animals" and she wanted none of that for her family.

George made sure his buildings were substantial and above ground. Besides the one-room house, he built an outhouse, and a corral for the animals. He would need to dig a root cellar for food storage, but that would have to wait until he returned in the spring.

Everything was ready and George was satisfied that Evelina would be pleased, especially with the spacious one room house built of lumber. They could easily add on to it if they needed to in later years. In the spring, when he returned after the land had thawed enough for plowing, he'd get Evelina and the children settled and then he could begin his real work of turning the soil for the planting of his first crop. The first winter frost was just beginning to settle on the prairie when, his first major task done, he headed back to Sentinel Butte, returned the team and wagon, and took the train east to Hickory where they could wait out the winter.

Evelina and George had ample opportunity during their last winter in Hickory to finalize plans for the big springtime moving trip coming up, when they would ship all of their things by rail and make the biggest move of their lives to their own new land on the prairie of western North Dakota.

When the decision to homestead in the Dakotas was finalized, Evelina, with two small children (a third one, two years old, had died) followed George to live on the prairie in a desolate part of southwest North Dakota.

They moved away from family, friends, culture, away from civilization as it had been known to them.

Getting There

The days of winter flew by as George and Evelina prepared for their big move. Family and friends wished them well with farewell dances and parties.

In the spring, when George was quite sure the land on the claim would be thawed enough to plow, he put his plans in motion. He and Evelina had decided that he would go ahead with their things, get everything in order and then she would follow with the children.

George traveled from Hickory, south to Minneapolis where he procured a box car. With his brothers to help him, they loaded the boxcar with a wagon, cook stove, beds, table, chairs, several trunks containing clothing, bedding and other items Evelina would need, a sewing machine, plow, harnesses, and farm implements. Some cows and a team of horses were also included. With enough blankets to cover him, and some food, George was able to bed down in some straw so he could travel and care for his animals along the way. It was a two-day trip across North Dakota, east to west, to Sentinel Butte.¹

When he arrived in Sentinel Butte, George got someone to help him unload the boxcar. The wagon came first, then the horses were hitched to the wagon. Very carefully so as not to spook the team, the other items were unloaded into the wagon. A few items were left at the depot to be picked up the following week when George would be coming for Evelina and their children, Helen and Lawrence. After he tied the cows to the rear of the wagon, he set off for the 12-mile drive to his claim south of town. He'd have everything ready for the family when they arrived, and maybe even get some plowing done.

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¹George's brother, Jerry, also homesteaded in North Dakota, and they rented the railroad car together. Jerry and his wife could not stand the extremes involved in North Dakota, and left after what seems to have been a short time. The car itself was a rented railroad emigrant car. It was a converted stock car partitioned across the middle and lined on the sides to keep out the cold. It had a potbellied stove in one corner fired with coal. Sheet metal part way up the walls and on the floor around the stove kept things from catching on fire. The first stop was in Staples, Minnesota, where the car was put on the Northern Pacific line to Sentinel Butte and all points west.

Knowing George had a place waiting for them made it easier for Evelina to leave Hickory and the comfort of Ben and Eleanor's home. The two-day train journey west across North Dakota with two active children was tiring but soon she'd be seeing George's smiling face. Just thinking about it lifted her spirit, as the view of the desolate prairie they were passing by did not.

On the evening of the second day of travel, the train pulled into Sentinel Butte. Straightening her travel dress the best she could, Evelina, with baby Lawrence in her arms and holding Helen's hand, stepped out onto the platform, scanning the depot for George. Her luggage was deposited beside her as the train moved on. Still there was no sign of him. Wearily, Evelina found a bench near the depot and sat there too tired to think about what she should do.

While she sat waiting, a young man who had noticed her anxiety approached to offer his help. Evelina, who spoke French, knew very few words in English, yet she managed to explain to him why they were there alone. He sympathized with her and told her she'd probably be more comfortable in the nearby hotel on Sentinel Butte's main street. He pointed out where it was located. He told her they could get food and maybe rest there while they waited. The young man promised to be on the lookout for George and tell him where his family was. Evelina thanked him, yet chose to wait at the depot a while longer.²

When it became too dark to see, Evelina gathered the children and her luggage and walked the short distance to the hotel. The night clerk let her wait in the lobby where she stayed throughout the night. The children slept soundly on the brown horsehair sofa, but not so for Evelina. She was sleepless with worry and disappointment.

Waiting for George

It was morning when the children stirred and began to ask about their papa. The residents of the hotel who had come down for breakfast wondered at seeing a young woman with children, each visibly

² The "young man" who helped them was dressed in cowboy clothes and was often referred to as "the cowboy" but also as "Badland Bill McCarty." Bill McCarty lived on his own claim east of ours near the Little Missouri River. He hired cowboys, some of whom played musical instruments and they would sometimes stop at our place much to our delight.

upset. In order to quiet them, Evelina took the children into the dining room for food. She had a cup of hot coffee, always with an eye on the front window looking out for George, who would surely come for them.

Towards mid-morning, in front of the hotel, came a wagon pulled by a frothing team of horses, and there in the front of the wagon stood George, tugging on the reins and yelling, "Whoa!" as the team came to a stop. The people in the lobby gathered around as George ran in, swept Evelina up in his arms while reaching for the children, and twirled them around with hugs and kisses. Smiles were everywhere. The young man from the depot had kept his promise to tell George where his family could be found, and now here they were, reunited once more.

George loaded everyone into the wagon, picked up some supplies and items still left at the depot from the week before, and headed towards the place that was to be their home. They had come to the last rise before reaching the home site when George, who had turned unreasonably quiet, pulled the wagon over to the side of the road. He sat with his head bowed. He still had not explained why he hadn't met them at the train the day before as planned, and Evelina waited to hear. What she heard sent a chill through her. He explained that when he returned and went out to deliver their belongings to their building site, there was nothing to be seen of it. All that remained were pieces of lumber scattered far and wide, most of it in gullies and draws nearby. As he stood there with his horses, cows, and a wagon load of belongings, wondering what he should do, he considered sending Evelina a wire telling her not to come. At that moment, some old-time residents in the area began stopping by and offered to help him find the lost lumber. They advised building a sod house as the only kind that could survive the vicious severe winter weather. Also, it would be cooler in the hot summer to come.

Knowing Evelina's feelings, George had to make a decision. He dug out chunks of sod and built a house half of sod, and the upper half of what lumber he could salvage. With the help of his new friends, he was able to complete a house of sorts, and an outhouse. The corral for the animals was partially finished, enough to keep the animals in at night.

It was an appalling sight that greeted Evelina's eyes and she could not hide her distress. Here was a squalid shanty on a bitter plain. She saw where George had swept the dirt floor and placed cloth and boards on

Continued next page

parts of the floor. Also, there were her things, the stove, trunks, bed placed in some sort of order. George had not had time to do plowing or any of the things he had planned before she came and it explained why he had used all of the time available in order to put something together for their arrival. It had been too late to ride into town for them so he had set out first thing in the morning and met the young man who directed him to the hotel.

It was a pitiful sight indeed. The roof was of sod with a chimney coming through the roof. George had cut two windows in the lumber of the upper part of the house, so it wasn't completely surrounded by sod squares. He sat slumped in the wagon while Evelina looked around. The children jumped up and down with excitement and enthusiasm. He fully expected to have to turn around and take Evelina and the children back to Sentinel Butte to catch a return train to Hickory. Evelina could feel George's misery, and though her heart was breaking, she heard herself say, "Well, George, I'll try. That's all I can say for now." Evelina, in her wrinkled travel dress, turned to George, who had tears in his eyes, and they clung together in shared pain. From the sharing came mutual strength and determination.

The little French family from Hickory, Minnesota, and civilization, were on a frontier of their own. When winter came, they experienced first hand the unrelenting fury of the wind as it swept furiously over the prairie and the stinging bitter cold of the snow

with icicles which formed everywhere. The windows were covered with beautiful crystal formations, making it impossible to see outside. They were comfortable enough in their half-sod, half-lumber house and thanked God for it. George had planted and harvested his first crop of wheat and Evelina had put in a garden and was able to preserve some of the produce for use over the winter. The children were happy. They did not miss Hickory and for the time being, neither did Evelina and George.

&

A few years ago, for the very first time, the child with the memories visited Hickory. Cousins, most of them descendants of Eleanor and Ben, live there or have summer homes on the original spit of land.

The main house has been completely remodeled with but a few major beams kept intact and visible. It was pointed out where the altar shelf had been in the living room and it didn't take much imagination to see them gathered there in prayer.

The post office has been a rural route for quite some time.

Roses still bloom with the same heady scent as they must have had then. Some starts were taken to be replanted and continued. There were numerous tall graceful trees with new ones springing up. The grass

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Eleanor Corey, and husband Les, in Hawaii, December 1998

was green and recently mowed. The sugar bush nearby uses modern ways of processing maple syrup. The schoolhouse is gone and children are transported into Aitkin for classes.

Where the cemetery was, is a quiet knoll of tall grass. The graves that were there have been transferred to the one in Aitkin and one can go to that cemetery and read the familiar names. Missing is what must have been a small burial place: that of the second daughter of George and Evelina, who died while they still lived at Hickory in the early years of their marriage. She had been buried at Hickory but was not moved with the others. Much tramping through the tall

grass looking for her grave proved fruitless. She remains on the knoll at Hickory. The far western North Dakota prairie of my memory has its own defining beauty, yet it is in sharp contrast to the gentle, mature place where civilization existed for my parents. They tried to bring the culture of Hickory to the prairie, where they reared their family, and shared their memories.

To Be Continued...

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You can send your memories and photos to the editor of *Chez Nous*, Dick Bernard, 7632 157th Street West #301, Apple Valley, MN 55124, and they will appear in these pages. Don't worry about perfect grammar!

A special note: Our hearts go out to John Rivard for the loss of his dear brother, Richard Pierre Paul Rivard, who died in Texas on May 7th, after a long and honorable life. We are grateful that they had so many wonderful years together as good friends, as well as brothers.



La Société Canadienne Française du Minnesota

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JE ME SOUVIENS . . .

The Catholic Church and its Role in the Lives of our Ancestors

by Dick Bernard

I am in my sixtieth year.

This fact is important because I am old enough to have seen the end of the "olden days", and lived, mostly, in modern times. Others are more senior than I, and have more traditional memories than I carry in my head and heart; many others cannot imagine the "olden days". ("Olden days"? These are defined later in this article).

Over the years of editing *Chez Nous*, many articles have appeared which refer to the Catholic Church, as well as its priests and nuns, as known by our French-Canadian ancestors. We've read a bit about the Church's relationship

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Edmond J. Massicotte's print: "Le Retour de la Messe de Minuit"

ARCHDIOCESE OF MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

Chronology of Some Churches with a French-Canadian Pedigree¹

Source: The Catholic Church in the Diocese of St. Paul by James Reardon, 1952 (Readers are invited to amend this list.)

- 1840 St. Peter, Mendota (October 2)
- 1841 The Cathedral of St. Paul (November 1), dedicated as Cathedral July 2, 1851. The present Cathedral is the fourth structure. The outline of the original church can be seen in a river front park at Kellogg Boulevard and Minnesota Street in downtown St. Paul. All the builders of the original church were French-Canadians: (Pierre and Charles Bottineau, two named Pierre Gervais, Vital Guerin, Isaac and Joseph LaBissoniere and Francois Morin. The land was donated by a French-Canadian.
- 1848 Church of the Assumption, Pembina, North Dakota²
- 1851 St. Anthony of Padua, Minneapolis
- 1852 St. John the Evangelist, Little (New) Canada
- 1853 Holy Family, Belle Prairie (Near Little Falls)
- 1854 St. Joseph, Walhalla, North Dakota
- 1855 St. Genevieve, Centerville
- 1863 St. John the Baptist, Dayton
- 1868 St. John the Baptist, Rocky Run (near Winsted)
- 1868 Church of St. Louis, King of France St. Paul (December 20)
- 1877 Our Lady of Lourdes, Minneapolis (July 27)
- 1882 St. Joseph, Stillwater
- 1884 St. Clotilde, Minneapolis (April 24) Now known as St. Anne's
- 1902 St. John the Baptist, Hugo

~

¹ This is an incomplete list, and readers are asked to provide other parishes in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Iowa, which might be considered of French-Canadian ancestry.

² Until 1875, when the size of the St. Paul Archdiocese was shrunk by 5/6, it covered an immense and essentially uninhabited area including the Dakotas and all of Minnesota.

with the common folk who formed its congregations in small towns and large cities in Québec and in the Midwest.

One cannot escape notice of the strong influence of the French and French-Canadian church in the upper Midwest. This strength was usually embodied in the local pastor and nuns, who impacted strongly the lives of the families who occupied the pews on Sundays, and holy days, and even at daily Mass.

It can reasonably be stated that French clergy and sisters were at the very roots of the church that became the Diocese of St. Paul. The rolls of clergy are full of names like Galtier, Ravoux, Cretin, and Goiffon. Even the famous Archbishop John Ireland was trained in seminary in France. For many years there was a steady stream of priests and nuns from Québec and France who came to minister to French-Canadian and other Catholics in the diocese of St. Paul.

From the earliest settlement days in Québec, the Catholic Church was a dominant force among the Canadian French. This was rooted in the settlement practices of France. St. Louis, Roi de France, after whom the downtown St. Paul, Minnesota parish is named, embodies the Catholic connection to France. As does Our Lady of Lourdes in Minneapolis, and a long list of churches named St. Jean-Baptiste, after the patron of French-Canadians, or Ste. Jeanne d'Arc, the patroness of France.

Many if not most readers of my age or older, and perhaps some who are younger, still remember the days of the ethnic church which lasted, in some places, until the mid-1950s. Indeed, if one looks hard enough today, one can still find vestiges of ethnic parishes even in St. Paul – witness the primarily Vietnamese Catholic Church in the frogtown neighborhood, or Our Lady of Guadalupe, serving the Hispanic population on St. Paul's west side. Such ethnic churches are rare these days.

Though I did not grow up in a French-Canadian community, I experienced the power of an ethnic church – in the early 1950s in Karlsruhe, North Dakota, in a German Catholic parish. Save for our family, and one other who was Protestant, everyone in this town during 1951-53, including the priest, was German and Catholic, and spoke German as their primary language. (We kids never knew the parish priest, Father Zimmerman's, first name – to us, the priest's first name was always "Father"!)

Continued next page

Down Memory Lane

In the early years of settlement here and elsewhere, national groups tended to settle together in small communities or neighborhoods. They possessed the commonality of culture and language and even nativity. Their mobility was limited largely to their neighborhood. It was here that they lived, worked, and worshipped. The story repeated itself endlessly across this country, and was not restricted only to Catholics of French-Canadian descent.

In the pre-Vatican II days (pre-1963-65), as readers of my generation well know, the language of the Mass was Latin. Every parish, regardless of nationality, heard the Mass in Latin. Those of us in the pews had Missals, in which one page showed the Mass in Latin ("Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa"), and the facing page, showed the translation into French, German, English, or whatever language we happened to favor. ("Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault").

To those of our ancestors who were illiterate in the written word – and there were many – bilingual missals were not relevant. But even though Latin was the formal language of the Mass, there were many ways that tended to cement the pre-eminence of a certain language in a church.

In the early days, the sermon was in the native language of the congregation. As integration of others into the congregation occurred, it became necessary to say the sermon in both English and French. To a parishioner whose first language was French, there was great ease of communication at the rectory with a pastor who shared the same first language. The parish priest was relied upon by some parishioners to write or read their letters for them.

These were the days of ritual – incense, communion cloths, hard bench kneelers.... The parish priest had a great amount of status and authority – perhaps much more so than bestowed by his flock today! We knew the priest wasn't God, but his authority was understood and accepted to be in a pretty direct line!

Continuing through much of the 20th century, priests and sisters were plentiful. Vocations were common. The priest who baptized me in 1940 recalled that on his graduation from seminary in Wisconsin in 1938 there were so many newly ordained priests that there were insufficient jobs for all of them.

Every now and then, the church appears to have been caught up in local ethnic conflicts, some of which could be very divisive. Perhaps this is a reason

the French-Canadians at St. Anthony of Padua in Minneapolis moved a mile or so down the street to the new Our Lady of Lourdes church in 1877.

(In my German grandparents' home area near Dubuque, Iowa, there are two country Catholic churches within a mile of each other. They apparently resulted from a squabble between the Germans and the Irish around the turn of the century).

There are many similar stories.

The End of the Olden Days

When the olden days ended can perhaps be endlessly debated. For some, it would be due to the major changes of Vatican II in the 1960s.

It appears that churches specifically organized to cater to certain ethnic groups became uncommon after 1900. Still, until the middle of this century, ethnic parishes remained common here and elsewhere. The transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous congregations happened gradually.

For me, it seems the olden days began to die by the 1950s due to several factors, among which were the following: First, improved transportation made it simpler for people to get around. Second, the ethnic neighborhoods became more anglicized as the kids grew up with English as their primary language, and the predominance of one ethnic group over another faded. Third, as the 1900s progressed, perhaps by 1950, the number of parishioners who were most comfortable in French were such a small minority of the congregation, that bilingual sermons were dispensed with. Finally, the supply of priests and nuns fluent in languages other than English began to disappear, to say nothing of a decrease in vocations generally.

Nowadays, one is left to look for church names, and the names of those who contributed the stained glass windows, to deduce which nationality built the original congregation. French-Canadian founded churches like Our Lady of Lourdes have the history, but it takes considerable work and dedication to preserve the French-Canadian tradition...and often this is an impossible task. ~

Readers: Your thoughts? Send them to Dick Bernard, 7632 157th St W #301, Apple Valley MN 55124.

FATHER JOSEPH GUILLEMETTE, A COUNTRY PRIEST

Father Joseph Guillemette almost lived to bridge three centuries. He was born in Minneapolis on April 9, 1897, and died at 100 on December 2, 1997, during his 75th year as a Catholic priest. From 1937 to 1980 he was pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Dayton, Minnesota (then a tiny country village northwest of Minneapolis on the Mississippi River, and now a suburban community).

Bill MacGregor, Elk River, grew up in Father Guillemette's Parish in Dayton, and was his friend until he died. "He was always a very friendly person," remembered MacGregor. "He told me that he didn't speak English until he was a teenager, and through his entire life he prayed his night prayers in French. He attended grade school at Our Lady of Lourdes in Minneapolis."

MacGregor remembers that, even after Vatican II, Father Guillemette continued to use the communion rail, though he adapted other practices in his church to the new rules. "He was always obedient to his Bishop." MacGregor said that the Priest once described to him how seminarians honed their speaking ability: "They were taken to the Cathedral late at night, and practiced giving sermons, while the rector listened at the back of the Church. 'Louder,' he would often say to them. In those days, there were no microphones, and one's voice needed to carry much more than is true today."

In the fall of 1995, the University of St. Thomas Alumni Notes profiled Father Guillemette. The following comments are from this profile: "[Father Guillemette] knew General Petain and had conversations with the famous philosopher Jacques Maritain. He even met a man who had his confession heard by the Cure of Ars, John Vianney, patron saint of priests...he was ordained by Bishop Dowling [in 1923] and is the last living seminarian of Archbishop John Ireland.

"'Father Joe,' as he is affectionately known by his fellow residents of Little Sisters of the Poor's Holy Family Residence in St. Paul, grew up near Nicollet Island [in Minneapolis, on the Mississippi]. Friends recall his telling of a building on the island that had a large steam pipe. As a boy, Guillemette spent happy afternoons digging up river clams, putting them in a pail, then hanging them on the steam building's pipe to cook - an entrepreneur's feast.

"Following his ordination in 1923 Guillemette was sent to study French at the Sorbonne to prepare for



Father Joseph Guillemette in 1923

a teaching assignment. It was in Paris that he met Petain and Maritain, and his time there gave him a deep appreciation for French culture and tradition.

"When he returned in 1931, Guillemette began teaching at St. Thomas Academy and the College of St. Thomas. One of his former students, Monsignor James Lavin, remembers, 'He always wore his cassock, wherever he was. The 'house cassock' is a custom in France....'

"...Guillemette founded a new parish for beetfield migrant workers who had been stranded in St. Paul with little money. The Mexican mission church, Our Lady of Guadalupe, was to serve to serve as a forerunner of the service involvement that is so much a part of today's St. Thomas.

"Guillemette drafted his St. Thomas students to attend services in the church, sing and talk with the people....Rev. Arnold Luger...remembers that the parish was very poor and that one of Guillemette's projects was to help feed his flock. 'We'd drive down to the freight yards in my car and patrol the tracks for

Continued next page

Continued from Page 4



Father Joseph Guillemette in 1997

discarded cases of produce...and then distribute the salvageable food to the parishioners....'

"For his last 43 years as an active parish priest, Guillemette was a country priest in a country parish – St. John the Baptist Church in Dayton, Minnesota. It was a French parish, and Guillemette would first conduct the homily in French and then in English. The school was in the church, which had the last coal burning furnace in the archdiocese. Guillemette, who had a boiler's license from the state, regularly descended into the basement to stoke the furnace until he retired at 83...."



Editors Note: We are grateful to Corrine Diffley, Apple Valley MN, and Bill MacGregor, Elk River, for the photos and material for this article.

We thank also Carmelle Pommepuy, of Seneville, PQ, for sending us the Massicotte print used in the article about the Catholic Church and its Role in the Lives of Our Ancestors.

The Year 2000 Calendar
"French in America" enters the 21st Century!

The first year of the new century will be marked by the retelling of events of the War of Independence in which the French participated so decisively (1775 at Lexington, MA – 1781 at Yorktown, VA).

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Other Société News

The La Société Canadienne Française **potluck dinner** will be held on the Canadian Thanksgiving, Monday, 11 October, beginning at 6:30 p.m. at St. Louis, King of France Catholic Church Hall, 10th and Cedar Street, St. Paul. Please bring a dish of your choice, and invite your friends and relatives. Let's join our Canadian cousins in this festive occasion.

And, please mark your calendars.....The Annual LSCF **Christmas Party** is set for Friday, 3 December 1999, beginning at 7 p.m., also at St. Louis Church.

Chez Nous is a newsletter paid for by member dues. If you are reading this and are not a member, we encourage you to join us. Contact John England at 2002 Palace Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105 for information. We will be changing our dues structure effective 2000. Complete information will be in the November-December edition of *Chez Nous*.
Merci!

A SPECIAL NOTE: The brief essay on the Catholic Church is intended to stimulate reflections, responses, even rebuttals. It comes from one who is a lifelong and often very active Roman Catholic who deeply respects the Church, but is not always in agreement with it. I have purposefully chosen to write this without getting input from several priests and nuns who read *Chez Nous*, in hopes that my commentary will stimulate their own. Your own commentary on the thoughts expressed is solicited. Send to Dick Bernard at 7632 157th St West #301, Apple Valley MN 55124.



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Ellie Corey, the youngest child of Evelina and George Lemire, of Aitkin, Minnesota, then Sentinel Butte North Dakota, continues her family's memories (begun in the Juillet-Août *Chez Nous*) as one of the only French-Canadian settlers on the southwestern North Dakota prairies. The family lived near Sentinel Butte from 1909-1935. Persons desiring the first chapter of this story should send \$1.00 and a 55-cent stamp to Dick Bernard, 7632 157th St. W, #301, Apple Valley, Minnesota 55124.

JE ME SOUVIENS . . .

A Family Story Continues

by Eleanor Emily Corey

I

At the Farm

There were times in the winter months when the sun shone and frozen snow had a fragrance all its own. It invited trespassing onto its pristine bluish-whiteness. Through the coldness of the air, always, there was the sun, round with warm promise. Evelina walked out on the quietness of the drifts when she could, but it was necessary for George to be outdoors on a daily basis. The cattle needed to be fed and ice that had formed on top of the water in their trough had to be broken, so the farm animals could drink.

Evelina now had three more children. Beatrice, Joseph, and Rita had come to join Helen and Lawrence and yet another child was on the way. The half-soddy was crowded and Evelina had little time for loneliness. Still, one wonders if winter may have seemed endless to her. The small windows were iced over much of the time and she



Ellie with some pets



Ellie (white cap) with sister Louise and brother Louis (twins) in Red Lake Falls, about 1927

Continued next page

could not look out. She needed to open the door to smell the fresh snow and feast on the sun as it shone on her ballooning body.

It had been a particularly long and lasting storm which hit the soddy with gusts of blowing snow. The storm would pause seemingly to catch a breath before unleashing an even harsher howling and gusting. Evelina and George found themselves nearly out of flour, sugar and other necessities and knew they would need to make a trip into Sentinel Butte twelve miles away.

They decided that as soon as the storm let up, even briefly, George would saddle up his horse and ride into town. If he left early in the morning he could possibly return at night; it would all depend on what the storm would do. George chopped a pile of wood and stacked it near the door so Evelina could reach it easily. There would be more than enough to keep his family cozy and warm. The horse was ready and when the weather permitted, he would head out.

At daybreak there was no howling of the wind and when George opened the door, he saw an overcast sky and a cold frozen cessation of the storm. It seemed like the right time to leave, so he dressed, grabbed a loaf of bread, and kissing Evelina goodbye, he hurried out to feed the cattle and break the ice for their water. He quickly saddled up his horse, threw the empty saddlebags across the saddle blanket and rode off across the frozen prairie towards town.

The children played together as usual and Evelina amused them by letting them make "dough-gods" from the last bits of her bread dough. These were fried and served warm with butter. The soddy was small and she was grateful because the pregnancy with this new baby was a difficult one and she was content to be as still as possible. The children loved it when she took her fiddle from its peg on the wall and played many merry tunes. They knew the words for some and sang along. Mostly, she sat and rocked Rita who was her youngest child.

Nighttime comes early during a prairie winter and it seemed to come even earlier with the storm darkening the sky. George would not be making it back that day. Nor would he be able to return for three more days: long days for those who waited in the soddy.

Evelina could hear the lowing of the cattle above the howling wind. The mournful sound meant that they had been too long without food or water. It seemed to Evelina to be even louder during the night when she was trying to sleep. When she opened the soddy door in the morning she could make out through the blowing snow the crazed, bulging eyes of the cattle.



St. Michael's at Sentinel Butte

She could see their long tongues snaking out between the logs of the corral trying to reach the straw which was combined with the mud binding the logs together. The water was frozen over and feed for the cattle was gone.

Something had to be done. If the cattle could be released from the corral, they could forage for grass shoots hidden beneath the snow in draws and against the banks of gullies. Their natural instincts for survival might save them until George's return.

Evelina knew she would not be able to cross the snow bank to get to the corral, but maybe Helen could. Helen was tall, strong for her ten-year old age, and she was a serious, practical child. Evelina talked to her and Helen was eager to go. It would be a task to lift the heavy crossbar that held the two corral doors shut, but Evelina thought Helen could do it.

Helen dressed in her warmest clothes and pulled her bright red stocking cap well over her ears. Evelina, looking into Helen's eyes, admonished her once more about approaching the doors quickly and quietly. She was to lift the bar, and jump as far to the side as she possibly could. Speed was important. Helen nodded with understanding registered in her deep brown eyes. She climbed solemnly to the top of the snow bank and walked resolutely towards the corral doors.

Continued next page

Evelina watched as her first born disappeared down the snowdrift in front of the corral doors. The cattle, sensing her approach, pressed madly against the doors causing them to bulge. Suddenly, a loud crack split the howling wind and Evelina watched speechlessly as the animals tumbled wildly over each other in their desperation to be free. They cut a dirty brown twisted trail as they disappeared over the snow out across the prairies. Remaining were the broken doors hanging askew on twisted broken hinges.

It wasn't until Evelina saw the red hat coming over and across the drifted snow that she realized she had been holding her breath. Tears froze on her face as she waited anxiously for Helen's descent to the soddy door. They hugged in the thankfulness and peace of the falling snow. That night, the howling wind without the lowing of the cattle was a welcome sound and Evelina slept.

The next day, George was able to return with saddlebags filled with supplies. He saw the broken corral doors and noticed that the cattle were missing and he wondered, but there would be time later to mend and search. For now, he had treats to share around and after caring for his horse, he would go in and hear the story. Again he would be proud of how his family was surviving on the prairie, and thank God for them.

II

A New Home

The new baby, Omer, was born in the spring of 1915. He was small and sickly. The difficult birth may have been among the reasons Evelina, leaving Lawrence and Joe with George, took Helen, Bea, Rita and Omer with her to Hickory, Minnesota, for a two months' stay. Nothing was ever revealed as to what went on between George and Evelina, because private, personal things were kept just that way. It is known, however, that when George went to bring her back, she returned to a real house built entirely above ground and out of wood. It may have passed as a shack in earlier days, but to Evelina, it was beautiful and she was back with her love, George.

The house had a combination kitchen-dining room, a large living room with enough room for beds in the corners, and two bedrooms (one with a shelf across the back filled with National Geographics, George's favorite magazine.) George had hung their favorite family and holy pictures on the walls along with the musical instruments. Beside the pictures of



Rita, Omer, and Joe with a Friend

Jesus and Mary, hung two violins with bows, a musical saw, a banjo, spoons as rhythm instruments, and two guitars.

As soon as they could, Evelina and George celebrated their new house by inviting friends, shoving beds, tables and chairs to one side, and having a dance. The ladies made a tub of sandwiches, but the children could not stay awake long enough to have some. They reluctantly fell asleep on coats piled high on the beds.

The half-soddy was filled in with rubble and dirt and was never mentioned again.

III

Play

The six young children loved to play around the sheep in the springtime. Evelina let them go off together, knowing they would look out for each other. The little lambs were especially enjoyable because they loved to follow. Over the rocks the children would go,

Continued next page

then under bushes, around the fence posts and through grass and always the lambs would follow them much to the children's delight.

One day, they heard Evelina calling them home for lunch but when they looked around they discovered that little brother, 2-year old Omer, was missing. They couldn't go home without him so they looked in all the places they had been. Finally, in desperation, Helen, who was tallest of the six, climbed up on the fence and looked as hard and far as she could. At last she spotted Omer's little green stocking cap sticking out of, of all places, the middle of the herd of sheep. His face was wet with tears and he was crying as loudly as he could. They had not heard him over the bleating of the sheep.

Helen also noticed something that sent a chill through her: it was the old ram. The old ram was a fearsome animal with ugly, curled horns on a strong head. He used his large head to butt whatever got between him and his ewes. Now, he was very close to their little brother.

No time was wasted. Helen jumped from the fence, shoved and pushed her way through the sheep straight to Omer, being very careful to keep some ewes between her self and the old ram. She grabbed Omer's arm and pulled him safely through the sheep, and away from danger. She dried his tears with her headscarf and they hurried home, all talking at once, for their late lunch.

IV

Education

Next to being French and Catholic, the most important thing in the lives of the pioneering prairie family was education of the many children to whom they had given birth. Evelina, who had married very young, was ashamed of her lack of formal education, yet she could read, write and do sums. She, and George, who had gone to eighth grade, shared their knowledge. Evelina wanted the children to have more out of life which meant being educated and George was content to leave the practicality of finding schools to Evelina.

A one-room school was built on the corner of land which was given to the county for that purpose by local farmers. For a time, the older children, Helen, Lawrence, Joseph, Beatrice, Rita, and Omer, attended the school. It was half a mile from their farm and the children could walk to it. This worked well until much to everyone's dismay, the school closed for lack of enough pupils. Furthermore, it was unknown when it would reopen.

In desperation, Evelina arranged for some of the older children to take turns traveling to Hickory and Stillwater, Minnesota for school. They stayed with relatives (Evelina's sisters Minnie Durand and Laura Belisle lived in Stillwater; there was also a Rose

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The farmhouse in about 1916

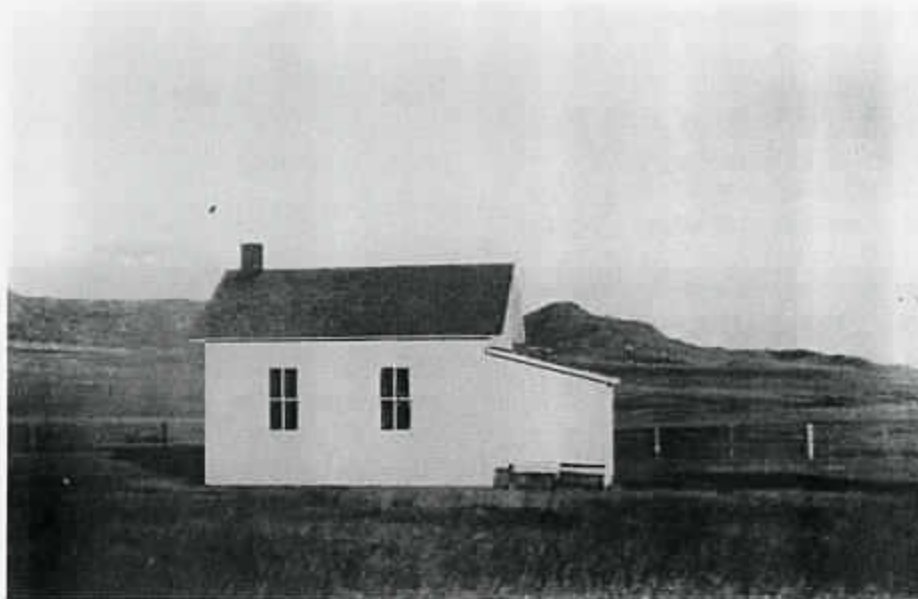
Burreault (sp) who was her relative in that area, and perhaps others as well in the Somerset and Range areas). This arrangement became impractical since there were more children needing schooling than relatives who could take them in. Evelina convinced George that they should rent a house where there would be a Catholic school for the half of their family still at home and needing education. The older members were now leaving to pursue careers of their own.

The town they chose was Red Lake Falls in the northwestern part of Minnesota. The community on the south side of the river where they rented a house consisted primarily of French speaking people. The teaching sisters in the school were French and the

fields. George traveled to Red Lake Falls throughout the winter when he could. In the spring the process was reversed and everyone headed back to the farm.

Evelina was happy with the education the children were getting but it isn't known how Father Lemire felt about having his brother's large family underfoot for months at a time. He was happiest when George would come on visits. As much as he respected the desire for education of his brother's children, he was saddened by the separations Evelina and George were undergoing.

Father Eugene Lemire was a big man who sat behind an even bigger desk and he had what to Evelina was a disgusting habit – chewing tobacco and spitting into a brass spittoon. A nickel was offered to anyone



Our one-room schoolhouse, in 1919

parish priest was Father Eugene Lemire (Uncle Eugene), George's brother. Most of the local businesses were French owned. The other side of the river was occupied by people of German descent.

Over a period of five years, Evelina, with George's help, was responsible for transporting the family to Red Lake Falls in the fall of the year and returning them back to the farm in the spring. The month of August was spent in a frenzy of sewing, canning and getting ready for the coming school year. Everything was loaded into a truck and two cars with one or two nights spent camping out in an empty schoolyard or near a farmer's barn. George and the two older sons drove the vehicles and after delivering everyone, they hurried back to tend the cattle and

who cleaned the spittoon and since it was always shiny, he must have had many takers. He also smoked cigars, another "disgusting habit".

All the children made First Confession and their First Holy Communion in his parish. The older ones were reluctant to confess to their uncle and tales are told of attempts to disguise their voices in the confessional. They much preferred waiting around for the young assistant who took over the confessional tasks.

According to Evelina, the worse thing her children could do was to pester their uncle. She had absolutely no control over his housekeeper, who

Continued next page

slipped them cookies whenever they came close to the rectory. Her name was Willamina. A small stained glass window in her memory exists over the sanctuary in the Red Lake Falls church.

When George came to visit, he and his brother Eugene fished through the ice for Pike. Often they would take us to watch workmen cut blocks of ice from the river, load them onto wagons and haul them to the icehouse. There they were cut into smaller blocks for delivery to the iceboxes in family homes.

At the end of one school year, in May, Father Eugene offered to drive his car to help the family return to the farm in what turned out to be the last of the many trips to and from Red Lake Falls. It had always been a happy time when they crested the last butte before sighting the farm: this was their home place. Tumbling out of the cars, they raced to find what new things had happened while they had been away for the winter. There were always new calves, lambs, ponies, and new life on the prairie. The fresh smell of new grass growing in the draws and gullies, the cool spring water, finding birds nests, getting a fat juicy pickle from the newly opened winter root cellar were all exciting things, especially to children.

In the fall of 1930, when it was time to enroll her children for school, Evelina decided she had too little energy left for the yearly exodus to Red Lake Falls. Due to a lack of sufficient iodine in her system, she had developed a huge goiter that had been surgically removed during the last winter in Red Lake Falls. Besides feeling fatigued, she was reluctant to spend another winter away from George. When she heard good things about the Sentinel Butte school system, she urged George to buy a house there. They purchased the old Hart place and enrolled six children in school. Forfeited was the French-Catholic environment she had found for her family in Red Lake Falls, Minnesota.

At the time schooling began in Sentinel Butte, most of the older children were already grown and away from home. Lawrence was in the Marine Corps, Joseph stayed to help on the farm, and Beatrice was a blues singer on a St. Louis Radio Station. Omer joined the Army, Rita went to nursing school in Valley City, North Dakota, and Helen worked for a while in a shoe factory near Hickory until she became ill with a ruptured appendix. She was two months in recovery before she was allowed to return home.

The younger six settled into a stable school life in Sentinel Butte. Eleanor was in first grade, Louis and Louise, the twins, were in grade 3, Ed was in fifth grade, Olivia in seventh, and Lucille in tenth.



Helen Lemire Wehrman, at about 27

V

Helen

Helen had a special place in Evelina and George's family. Not only was she their first born and the one who had given up her shoes for the burial of a little sister, but it was she in whom they placed great trust. It can also be said that as her parents, they were careful not to take advantage of her and they saw that she received special privileges.

Owning the wild strawberries on the prairies was one. The younger children were reminded to leave them where they were for Helen. She would pick them and share them as she wished.

Another was the rhubarb patch where rhubarb grew in thick, juicy stalks down by the spring. She knew when they were ready to be pulled and made into jam or tangy pies. Sometimes she cut the rhubarb into sticks to be passed around and dipped into sugar. It was Helen's treat.

Continued next page

She had her own horse, saddle and bridle. On a lucky day, she would lift one of us to the saddle in front of her and ride out on the prairie. Riding was a private time for her and a special joy.

One year, she chose to take the responsibility of raising turkeys instead of the usual chickens, and we all watched as she coped with obtuse ways of turkeys. She could hardly wait until they were old enough to sell, or be slaughtered and canned.

Farmers helped each other at butchering time and shared parts of the animal. If it was a hog, some people were adept at cleaning the intestines and using them as casings for sausages. Others made good head cheese while others knew just the right ingredients for pickled pig's feet. The French cherished the taste of "boudin" and Helen had become skilled in preparing it. Evelina was usually in charge, but when she could not be there, Helen was allowed to gather the blood in scrupulously clean conditions.

Butchering could not begin until Helen was ready with her large white enamel loaf pan. After she had gathered all she needed, she allowed it to cool and then baked it in the oven. The consistency was like large curd cottage cheese and it was sautéed with chopped onion, made into a cream sauce, and served over baked potato or toast.

Helen was allowed to travel to Hickory by herself to visit her grandparents. She would dress up for the train trip and we'd gather at the depot in Sentinel Butte to see her off.

Helen's younger brothers and sisters were expected to be respectful to her and she proved to be well deserving of their respect.

VI

Sentinel Butte 1930-35

There are towns with definite edges, and Sentinel Butte, North Dakota is one. Step out of most back yards, and you were out of town and on the prairie. It was an "alive" town with a passenger train and the Great Northern freight train roaring through on the main line to the west coast two or three times a day. Sometimes the trains stopped to either pick up or deliver people or things. Two tall grain elevators were part of the landscape - one on the east and one on the west edge of town.

U.S. Highway 10 also split the town, but not as drastically as did the trains. The highway had two gas stations, one at the east edge and the other at the west

edge of town. It ran parallel to the tracks in the north part of town. In the south part of town, also running parallel to the tracks and on the south edge of town was Main Street. The Lemire house, known as the "old Hart place" was located at the west end of Main Street.

Directly behind the house was a small body of water which everyone called "the dam", though no one could say what it dammed. It was used for swimming and boating in the summer and ice skating in the winter. CCC boys from Medora came for summer swimming and to woo the local girls. Olivia and Lucille were thrilled, but Evelina was not, and she kept a close watch.

Every child's dreamland existed on the southeast edge of town. Old, discarded farm machinery was dumped everywhere. Within the pile of junk were levers, lots of wheels, bucket seats, screws, nuts and bolts, gearshifts, and pedals, all in perfect non-working condition. Occasionally bird's nests were found.

Out from the east edge of town was the local cemetery: a place of quiet and respectful behavior.

On the northeast edge of town was a large two story gray house with white trim. Never was it occupied and it didn't have a name like "the old Scott place" or the "old Hart place," but it was popular because it had the longest, smoothest sidewalk in town. This sidewalk went from the front porch, and sloped down ever so slightly for more than a block. Louise, Louis and Eleanor learned to roller skate there along with other town children. They also rode scooters and coasted our wagons and thought some very rich people must have built it and lived there at one time. The house exists in the same spot today, the fall of 1999.

St. Michael's Catholic church with its tall spire dominated the northwest edge of town. Evelina took her turn cleaning the church. The children begged to be chosen to help because after they brought up the cleaning supplies from the small basement below the church they were free to climb to the choir loft and play with the pump organ with its enticing pedals and stops. *(Note: later in her life, the author played the organ and directed choir in her parish church for many years. Her daughters are or have been church musicians.)*

The Congregational Church was on the west edge of town. So was the house of Pauline, one of Eleanor's school friends. Pauline's little brother died and she invited Eleanor to see him in the coffin and to touch his cold face. It was her first experience with a dead person. The next day she went with her parents to his burial in the cemetery.

Continued next page



Sentinel Butte School

Angeline was another friend. She was the first one to get a magic decoder badge from the Little Orphan Annie radio show. With a label from a box of Ovaltine, a badge would be sent for decoding a secret message for the next day's show. Ovaltine was expensive for a family with more pressing needs so having a sharing friend like Angeline, whose father owned the local grocery store, was a blessing. "Cute little she, it's Little Orphan Annie", were the words to the theme song of the radio show.

Almost in the middle of town was a two story eight room brick schoolhouse with basement. A slide chute for fire evacuation snaked down one side. The usual playground equipment existed except for an unusual group of swings called "Giant Strikes". One could hang onto them and be swung out and up as far as one dared. They were eliminated because if a swing was let go, it was free to land anywhere, and often it was on someone's head, causing injury. The school was the hub of the community during the school year. A community center building was nearby which was used for plays, traveling programs and dances.

It was to George and Evelina's house at the end of Main Street and close to the train depot that hobos would run during a train's brief stop. Even when a train was moving slowly through, someone from the front of the train would jump off, run to their house, grab a sandwich and manage to catch a car at the end of the train. The trains were exceptionally long. Evelina was adept at speedily putting together

something between two slices of bread. The family referred to her sandwiches as "rapid slab" sandwiches. The hobos thanked her as they ran back to the train. Having heard that houses where food was freely given were marked in some way, the children would search for a possible mark. None of the men would tell if such a mark existed. The children often waved to them as they passed, riding on any part of the train that would hold them, and sometimes the hobos waved back.

Evelina was clean and successful with food preparation. Word reached the department of food preparation at North Dakota State Agricultural College (now NDSU at Fargo), about her ability to preserve meat, and a group of students were scheduled to observe her in action. Unfortunately, it was to be in the fall, after they left North Dakota.

On days when there was no school, whoever wanted to would go out to the farm. One day while there, Eleanor saw an immense black wall coming out of the west towards the house. Frightened, she ran to the house to ask what it was. Evelina took one look and called everyone in to put mattresses up to all windows and doors. It was one of many dust storms. When it blew past, they looked out to see everything covered with a thick layer of gray-brown dust. It was one of many dust storms experienced in what came to be called "the dirty thirties". Crops had been eaten by

Continued next page

grasshoppers, very little money was being paid for the sale of animals, and dust storms were the worst of all. Evelina and George watched their land holdings dwindle to the original claim, and they were barely able to afford the upkeep of the family on what they could produce on those remaining 400 acres.

With no money coming in, George and Evelina decided to leave their land to Lawrence, who had come back from the Marines and was willing to try his hand at farming. Lawrence hoped eventually to raise cattle on the Little Missouri River sixty miles east of the farm. George and Evelina had heard of opportunities to earn money picking fruit in Oregon. They bought a small trailer to hold their things plus camping gear and hitched it to their small Chevy sedan. George and Evelina, with Eleanor between them, sat in the front seat, and Olivia, Lucille, and Louise sat in the back. Ed and Louis would follow by bus after a place had been located.

The fact that they were moving was not shared with the children until it was nearly time to leave. There was no time to say goodbye to friends. One morning, the first week in July, they packed and left. George seemed to think they would return if

things didn't work out, but Evelina was anxious to remove her teenage daughters, Lucille and Olivia, away from the CCC boys and any ideas of marriage. She was also eager to put everyone in a Catholic school once more.

On the day they were leaving Eleanor got into the car with her two dolls and was told she could not bring them, not even one. She went back inside the house and laid her dolls on a bed, watched as the lids closed over their beautiful glassy eyes, tucked them under a blanket, and left her childhood there. She had her 10th birthday somewhere between North Dakota and Oregon on July 14, 1935.



Ultimately the Lemire family settled in the area of Medford, Oregon. By no means was Oregon a Shangri-La, especially in the early years. At least once, early on, the family almost moved back to North Dakota. But George and Evelina lived the rest of their life in the beautiful state that has been Eleanor's home since 1935.



Ellie and husband Les (behind her) at a wedding in New York on September 11, 1999 – a long way from the prairie!

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We Mourn in Passing . . .

Our next issue will feature a fond remembrance of the family homestead of Théophile Onesime Rivard, now gone forever.

The Old Rivard Homestead, Somerset, Wisconsin



La Société Canadienne Française du Minnesota
Elway Station, P.O. Box 16583
St. Paul, MN 55116-0583

PO Box 16583
St. Paul MN 55116-0583

Dues for 2000 are now payable, as follows:

Family \$18.00

Single &

Senior Couple \$15.00

Senior (over 62) \$12.00

Make checks payable to LSCF, remit by mail to
John England, treasurer, 2002 Palace Ave, St. Paul MN 55105

Please include with your application:

Name(s)/Organization

Mailing Address/zip

Telephone, with area code

Optional, but desired:

Your e-mail address, occupation, interests, IDEAS....

*There is a very important message from your president below and on reverse.
Please take time to carefully read and consider its contents.*

Please note our new mailing address (above).

**OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY POTLUCK
IS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 7 P.M.
AT THE CHURCH OF ST. LOUIS, 10TH & CEDAR, ST. PAUL
PLEASE ATTEND, AND BRING A GUEST OR TWO OR THREE!
AND BRING A SMALL GIFT, OR TWO, OR THREE,
FOR A SURPRISE EXCHANGE!**

For those wishing to thank Ellie Corey for her wonderful family story,
Please write to her at 1902 Harvey Road, Cottage Grove OR 97424
And use Ellie's example to prepare your own family story for your own descendants.
They will deeply appreciate your efforts.

**A Very Important Message from the President of
La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota
Dick Bernard
7632 157th St W #301
Apple Valley MN 55124**

The dues amounts for the year 2000 are substantially increased over the amounts charged in 1999. This dues increase is the first that any of us can recall in the last 17 years. The Board at its September 23 meeting approved the increase. (over)

For those interested in such things, previous dues were Family \$15.00; Single and Senior Couple \$10.00; Senior (over 62) \$8.00.

We made another change which will be very, very important to note: effective with this issue of *Chez Nous*, we are mailing *Chez Nous* only to those who have paid their dues. We have also decided that we will mail the newsletter First Class, due to the decreasing numbers of dues paying members, and the extra effort involved for a volunteer to handle the work for bulk rate mailing.

Why make these changes when they may, possibly, drive away some of our remaining members?

We had to finally decide that if this organization is to survive, those who enjoy the benefits need to recognize that these benefits have a cost. It seems a risk worth taking.

There are many examples of the hard facts facing us. One which I would like to emphasize, for very personal reasons, is *Chez Nous*, now in its 21st year, and which I have co-edited or edited since 1985.

(Regardless of member support or not, every dues paying member will receive the usual six issues of *Chez Nous* in the year 2000.)

When we considered budget at the last meeting, we looked at prior year expenses. The cost of printing and mailing *Chez Nous* alone was approximately the full dues paid by a senior member. In other words, any other organization expenses not related to *Chez Nous* had to come from some other funds, primarily from donations or our very small financial reserves. It just didn't make sense.

More starkly, I learned that to commercially produce and mail a *Chez Nous* equivalent in size and quality to our Juillet-Aout, 1999, issue would cost ten times what La Societe actually paid for that newsletter. In other words, 90% of the real cost of *Chez Nous* comes from volunteer and completely unpaid labor from myself, Catherine Rivard, Seraphine Byrne, and before her Leroy Dubois, and George LaBrosse. These are the people who put the paper together, provide labels for mailing, and do all of the duties connected with mailing. Volunteers are very hard to find, and keep, these days. It is hard to keep *Chez Nous* alive and well.

Similarly, La Societe has for years kept our tradition alive at St. Paul's Festival of Nations. To do so requires an immense expenditure of volunteer time, and money to build an exhibit. It is difficult to keep this effort alive.

So...where do you fit in to this picture?

First, if you read this issue for free, please join us.

Members: We know many of you have limited financial resources and ability to participate in our events. Even so...

We request that you pay your dues - which were not increased for 17 years - and perhaps add a few extra dollars if you can afford them.

You can help enlist additional members to our Society.

You can provide ideas, stories, photos and the like for future issues of *Chez Nous*.

If you are able to do so, you can attend and support our potlucks and events (as our Christmas Party, at St. Louis Church, 10th and Cedar, St. Paul, on Friday, December 3, at 7:00 p.m.), and help at our Festival of Nations booth next May 4-7, 2000.

Merci Beaucoup! Let us work together to continue our tradition.

With your active assistance LaSociete will live on; without it, we will, like all mortals, pass on - and sometime, some day, some one will wonder, "what ever happened to La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota?"

Dick Bernard
612-891-5791

Do not forget to listen to

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BONJOUR MINNESOTA

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Bonjour Minnesota est un programme de radio bilingue

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FRANCOPHONE EVENTS occurring in the Twin Cities will be
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CULTURE from France and francophone countries will be
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Georgette possesses an enormous and diverse
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STAY TUNED

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(OVER)

Year 2000 Calendar
Les Français d'Amérique/French in America

*"With us, they enter the 21st century, and
as long as we can tell and retell their story, they will be among us"*

In the year 2000 begins the retelling of events of the American War of Independence in which the French participated so decisively.
(Lexington, MA 1775 – Yorktown, VA 1781)

The year 2000 Calendar also introduces other Frenchmen who played crucial roles at different periods in American history. It will acquaint you with the celebration of the 150th anniversary of California, and take you to the Upper Saint-John Valley, home of the largest concentration of Acadians in the United States outside of Louisiana . . .

Prices:

US\$6.95 + \$1.55 each for postage & handling = **US\$8.50**

US\$6.95 each (postage & handling included) for an order of 5 calendars or more sent to a same address.

Back copies can be obtained for \$5 a copy, postage included, if they are ordered with the year 2000 Calendar.

Make check payable to: *French-American Calendar 2000* and sent it to **R. Mikesell**, 1155 E. 56th Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60637-1530.

Number of copies: _____ back copies : _____

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Address: _____

Chez Nous

The newsletter of **La Société Canadienne Française** du Minnesota

Janvier-Février 2000 Elway Station, P.O. Box 16583, St. Paul, MN 55116-0583 Vol. 22, No. 1, Issue 117

JE ME SOUVIENS . . .

Memories of the Homestead of Théophile Onesime Rivard

By Catherine Rivard

We had hoped that this article would be written by our past president, John Rivard, but his recent eye surgery precludes that possibility. Instead, I will write my own recollections of the homestead, though they can never measure up to John's far more intimate memories of that house. We hope that in a future issue, he will be able to share them with us.

I began life in a fog. Being a profoundly near-sighted child, my expanding comprehension of the world around me was slow and confined to things I could examine with the end of my nose. When I finally got glasses, at the age of twelve, the world's clarity and detail astounded me. I remember very well my

first sight of leaves still on the branch, covered with tiny veins. I thought it was a miracle! And there were many more delightful discoveries to come.

One of them was of the old family homestead one mile east of Somerset, Wisconsin, built by my great-grandfather Théophile in 1863 for his new wife, Marie-Anne Lemire. It was not only the discovery of the homestead that was grand, it was the opportunity to discover it with my father. Many of you will remember Joseph Rivard, one of our enthusiastic members of LSCF. He was born in Amery, Wisconsin in 1904, and died in 1987. Because he was nearly 50 years old when I was born, to me he always seemed a silent old man, seldom sharing his thoughts and feelings with others, and virtually never with his children.

Dad was a very hard-working machinist. He'd had little formal education and had endured many personal tragedies long before my birth. Even before I knew of those things, his silence seemed to me impenetrable, and somehow sacred. When I was finally given the chance to ride out to Somerset with him, on one of his annual pilgrimages, I was elated—and a little scared.

Dad always had two missions on these journeys: first he'd go see his cousin, Father John Rivard, at his Somerset parish, and then he'd ride



The Old Rivard Homestead, Somerset, Wisconsin

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out to see Uncle Sam at the old homestead built by his grandfather, Théophile Onesime Rivard (1835-1913).

Now, Théophile was the first Rivard of our line to leave Québec for the United States. He was one of 17 children born to Adélaïde Lupien and Benjamin Rivard, a well-respected citizen and postmaster of the village of Bécancour. Benjamin had also been one of the local patriots of the Rebellion of 1837. (Théophile's brother, Louis Ludger, who stayed in Québec, was the father of Adjutor Rivard, author of the French Canadian classic, *Chez Nous*.)

Following his nose for career opportunities in carpentry, construction, and farming, Théophile came to Wisconsin in 1861 and in 1863 began building the house in which he and Marie-Anne would raise 13 children, including my grandfather, Ferdinand.

John tells an interesting story about Théophile and the homestead in a wonderful tape he made for the family

when Dad was getting ready to leave for Somerset, hoping to make it a private pilgrimage, when I'd cry and carry on until he agreed to take me. Maybe I just noticed his own reverence for the place, and wanted to be part of it. In later years, his annoyance at my presence gave way to pleasure, and he began to enjoy telling me about life on the farm, and growing up in a French-speaking home and community. I suspect that he hadn't had an interested audience in some time. We had many wonderful experiences, driving around the Somerset/Amerly area, looking at old foundations and weatherworn barns, while Dad explained to me what they had meant to him. These places were especially important to him because, when he was about 14, his father had sold their Amerly farm and moved the family up to Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. That experiment was a failure and they lost everything. Dad always said it was the biggest mistake of his father's life.



Marie-Anne and Théophile Rivard

some years ago. Théophile had an overpowering fear of fire. So, when he stayed up late reading, one of his children was required to stay up with him. When Théophile finished his reading, he would extinguish the fire in the fireplace. The sleepy child then had to double- and triple-check that the fire was completely out, before Théophile could climb the stairs to bed.

The house was built according to classic 19th century prairie architecture found throughout the Midwest. I remember well the built-in kitchen cabinets. In the mid-60s, I was too young to understand the significance of the homestead in historical or architectural terms, but I did sense something special about it that made it a privilege to be there. I remember more than one occasion

I don't remember the first time I met Dad's uncle Sam Rivard, but I do remember clearly his impression on me. He was the youngest son of Théophile and Marie-Anne, but the concept of his ever having been young was far beyond my adolescent comprehension. If my father seemed old to my eyes, then Uncle Sam was as ancient as Stonehenge, and seemingly as sturdy. Balding, toothless, and completely oblivious to my presence, he was the last remnant of the old guard.

Few words were necessary between Dad and Uncle Sam—everything had been said long ago. They would sit and drink coffee, poured by Aunt Pauline. They

Continued next page

would cough, grunt, and sometimes indulge in the hawk-hawk-spit ritual so cherished by old men. Feeling a little like a fifth wheel, I'd wander off to the back of the house and visit Sam's old white cat, who had a favorite sleeping spot in the sun. The poor thing was too old to do more than roll over with arthritic groans and let me stroke the time-soiled yellow fur on his tummy. Blind and deaf, he wasn't much more company than grunting grownups, so eventually I'd wander back into the kitchen.

One of my favorite memories of Uncle Sam was watching him eat corn on the cob. Since he hadn't a tooth left in his head, he was obliged to scrape it off the cob with a knife. Then he'd gather up the niblets and pour them into his mouth. I would watch, entranced, his great age and my father's obvious affection for him elevating him in my small mind to nearly heroic proportions.

Sam's homespun ways didn't bother my Dad in the least. In fact, he seemed to take on a new personality when we visited this house, happily adopting those ways himself. He had not grown up in this house, but it was one of his favorite places, and when he entered it he seemed at peace with himself, safe in his own element. More remarkable to me was the fact that his characteristic silence, which often seemed disturbing back in Minneapolis, became a contented one.

These visits were not always pleasurable peeks back at a more comfortable era; sometimes they could be a disheartening reminder that we can never truly recapture the past. I remember once coming around the corner from a visit with the cat to find my father and Sam rocking on the porch. My father was mopping his eyes with his handkerchief, overcome with some sadness he had confided to Sam but could not entrust to me. "Why did she have to die just when things were going good?" he said, falling silent when he saw me. Sam sat quietly rocking, gumming the stem of his corn cob pipe.

The death of my father's first young wife, Hattie, in 1946, after they had struggled through the Depression and then the War, was a blow from which he would never fully recover. That tragedy, combined with his having lost Somerset and all it represented



Left to right: Wilfred, Elizabeth, Rita, and Joseph Rivard, about 1916

after the move to Gravelbourg, was never far from his mind. I began to see why the homestead was so important to him, predating as it did so many sorrowful times.

Thankfully, visits to the old house were usually happy experiences that gave us pleasure, not pain. There was a little excitement on these visits, too. I recall being yanked over a fence in the very nick of time to escape a charging sow, who was enraged that I'd had the audacity—or stupidity—to pet one of her piglets. I can't remember if this happened at Uncle Sam's farm, but it's certainly an indelible Somerset memory. I also remember that my father was nearly as mad at me as the sow was!

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When it came time to leave, Dad would pull himself reluctantly out of his chair. He and Sam would amble over to the car, and the two of them would grunt, hawk, and spit some more. Sometimes one of them would mutter, "Yup." The other would reply, feelingly, "Yup." It seemed comical to me at the time, but I know now that those "yups" contained an abundance of unspoken meaning.

Then Dad would climb into the car and off we'd go. When we passed over the line to Minnesota, the comforting sensation of having returned to a simpler time would evaporate, and real life would intrude on the dream.

Of course, the old world we returned to on these visits may have been simpler, but it was not easier. Life as a French-speaking person in that era was often complicated by prejudice; worry over the crops was a trial for the father; and the mother had to care for many hungry children. Think of having 13 kids with no running water! But there was clarity of role and value. They knew who they were, and felt confident of the place they believed God and the Church had assigned them. In retrospect, I think this is what my father missed most of all.



Théophile's homestead was destroyed recently to make room for new development, a fate that is affecting many old farm homes of the Midwest. I'm grateful that my father didn't live to see that mournful event. It is hard to know that I will never be able to rediscover it with wiser adult eyes that can finally appreciate its full significance to both my family and our rich French Canadian history. Farewell, old homestead. And thank you, Théophile. *

My Memories of St. Jean-Baptiste

by Treffle Daniels

Dick Bernard's recent article (*Chez Nous* Septembre-Octobre 1999) on the role of the Catholic Church within the French-Canadian culture triggered my memory about my early days in a French church, St. Jean-Baptiste, in Duluth, Minnesota's west end. Although I moved from Duluth almost fifty years ago, I still have memories of that parish. My maternal great-grandparents, both born in Quebec, were buried from the church, as well as my maternal grandparents. These ancestors passed on before my birth. My parents were married and also buried from the church. At my mother's death in 1988, she was the

oldest parishioner who had been baptized in the parish—number one on the seniority list! My three sisters and I were baptized, confirmed, and also graduated from the parish school. Two were married there, as was I.

These thoughts that I write are just fragments from my memories. I could write about many additional things, events recalled, people described. This is a start in recording the past.

Do you have a French church in your life's history? Now is the time to record your memories for the future. If you don't, who will?



If you were a French-Canadian living in Duluth during the first 50 years of the 1900s, it is likely that you belonged to St. Jean-Baptiste Catholic Church, commonly called the French church. The original parish was established in 1885 and had a building not far from the downtown area. In the early 1900s a new church was built at 25th Avenue West and Third Street. The church itself was on the second floor. The lower level housed the original school. That level was remodeled into meeting rooms when a new school was built. On the same block was "The French Hall" which had an auditorium used for plays, pageants and movie. Downstairs was the cafeteria. Also on the block was a

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Young girl at the steps leading to the original St. Jean-Baptiste Church, Duluth, Minnesota. Undated.

three-story convent for the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, a Canadian order that staffed the school. Finally, the school itself faced Second Street, behind the Church. In addition to a large number of French Canadians there was a small group of Belgian immigrants and their offspring in the congregation.

Within three blocks of the church were two other parishes organized on ethnic lines. St. Clements served Irish and German folks, while Polish residents attended Sts. Peter and Paul. There seemed to be little cooperation between the churches, and the only time a French church member visited a neighboring parish was on Holy Thursday when it was the custom to visit various churches. It was unheard of to attend Mass or other services outside of your own parish.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate from St. Boniface, Canada, served the parish. They were fluent in French and gave sermons in that language at some Sunday Masses until the late 1940s. Sermons were quite predictable in pre-Vatican II days as only one set of readings were used, rather than the three-year cycle of readings used at present. In the early years, the language of the parish was French. My father's death in 1948 is recorded in French. Other records, such as baptisms and marriages, were also in French.

Frequently the sermons revolved around detailed explanations of the many church regulations, especially those concerning fasting, abstinence and marriage. The seven capital sins, especially those of the flesh, were other favorite topics. Marriages outside of the faith were deplored to such an extent that couples in "mixed marriages" were not allowed a nuptial Mass and some were performed in the rectory, or if in church, outside the altar rail. (Another definition of "mixed marriage" was one in which a spouse was not from the French church!)

In addition to Masses a great number of devotions were held: rosaries, novenas, missions, Stations of the Cross are some that come to mind. Usually these were held in the evening to permit greater attendance. An annual novena to St. Anne coinciding with her feast in the summer gave rise to this bit of doggerel recited by young women: "Dear St. Anne, send me a man, as fast as you can."

One of the great annual pageants centered around Midnight Mass. Before the service itself the school children presented a play with singing and acting at the altar. Its theme was the birth of Christ. Being chosen as the Blessed Virgin and carrying the infant Jesus statue into the church was perhaps the highest honor a girl could attain. So popular was this event that tickets at 25 cents were necessary to get a seat. If your family had paid its pew rent of \$2 per quarter, you were given a pair of tickets.



**The original St. Jean Baptiste Church,
Duluth, Minnesota. Undated.**

When school children entered daily Mass or any service during the school time, they were assigned, under the sisters' watchful eyes, to sit in certain pews according to their grade. Girls were on the left of the church, boys on the right.

The parish had a broad array of organizations. For the men it was the French Club, originally an organization to help French Canadians become acclimated to the USA. Later it was just a social group.

There was also a Catholic Order of Foresters group. The women had a guide of some sort to help with altar projects but the organization was social in nature. An active Boy Scouts troop plus a Holy Name Society were available for the boys. Girls were encouraged to become Girl Scouts and later to join the Sodality of Our Lady. Boys were recruited to become altar boys and girls were enlisted into a junior choir. An adult sang at various events such as high Masses and holidays. Under guidance of the sisters and priest, leaders were developed. Sometimes high marks in school were equated with leadership opportunities.

The laity seemed to have a very small role in official church affairs. Several older men were trustees, almost a lifetime appointment. Ushers were seated at the rear of the church to collect dimes from attendees as pew rent. Some families paid a pew rent of \$8 annually so didn't

Continued next page

have to come up with the weekly dime. Adult education was unknown. Catholic newspapers as well as religious magazines were encouraged to be read through pulpit announcements. No bulletin of events was known. One had to listen to the priest's announcements at Sunday Mass to learn of parish events. Devotions, especially during Lent, Advent, and special times such as missions and novenas, were stressed.

The school was staffed by French-Canadian sisters. Many were natives of Canada and had French as their first language, though all spoke English. Several were daughters of parishioners, and their families were held in high esteem. Students progressed through the school one grade at a time with one room per grade. Under such circumstances, you really got to know your classmates. Numbers sometimes decreased as a class passed through school, especially in junior and senior high school. Some quit to go to work, others to attend public or other Catholic schools for a broader education, and especially for boys, to have shop classes or sports programs. The only sport encouraged at St. Jean's was boy's basketball and it wasn't until the late 1940s that a high school team operating under state rules was organized. Previously the boys played in an elementary league under the sponsorship of the Knights of Columbus. At one time the young men and some high school boys played in a recreational league in the city.

As with most schools of the time, the curriculum stressed the "3 R's", though Religion as the fourth R was stressed. Religion was taught from the Baltimore Catechism with much memorization. Some instruction in science, music and art was also available. History and geography were important and a heavy dose of patriotism was very apparent. Although a large gym was available it was seldom used for physical education: heating costs were prohibitive, there were no male teachers, and the sisters just weren't trained in that area. Plays and pageants were performed in the French Hall to audiences of proud parents. Of course, French was taught in all the grades. On the high school level, Latin and formal education in French was offered. (My youngest daughter is a certified French teacher, a trait she inherited from her mother who wasn't French-Canadian, but a good student in French at St. Jean's. My own ability in foreign languages is limited.)

The sisters had a profound affect on the students, instilling in them a sense of morals, scholarship, and habits that lasted a lifetime. Graduates frequently went into the work force to support their families. Very few students went on to further education for several reasons: it was an expense that many families couldn't afford, and the jobs available didn't demand the training needed in today's world. (In about Grade 3 or 4 a sister gave me Marco Polo's life to read. Did that influence me to

become a librarian in my middle years?)

Support of the parish and school was always difficult endeavor. During the heyday of the parish in the 1920s-1950s, most families were headed by fathers employed in semi-skilled occupations in the city's many factories, railroads, and stores. I don't recall any middle-class or professional members. The large debt to build the school took years to pay off. Keno was a twice-weekly fundraiser to pay the bills. Special monetary gifts were expected by the parish on Christmas and Easter. Sundays following those days featured the pastor reading each family's contribution, from the most to the least, from the pulpit. How the school functioned, and how the sisters were cared for, was a miracle. Tuition was very meager. Sacrifices were many and made by all: priests, sisters, and parishioners.

Each of the three neighborhood parishes had their own elementary school. St. Jean's had a high school. There was little cooperation between them. Some graduates of the other schools did matriculate to the French school for their high school.

(Being a crossing guard was an honor for boys in Grades 5 to 8. It was not uncommon to harass students from the other schools when they walked on Third Street to their school. Being slow to put up the metal stop sign to permit their crossing at busy intersections was un-Christian-like behavior.)



What happened to the French Church? Duluth suffered a loss of jobs in its industries much the same as other cities of the "rust belt." Many people moved into the suburbs. St. Clements was closed in the early 1970s. The senior high at St. Jean's was discontinued in the 1960s, and the school itself was closed in the late 1970s, leaving Sts. Peter and Paul as the only neighborhood Catholic school. In 1993, a fire destroyed that school. A decision was made to combine the three previous parishes into one called Holy Family. The French church was demolished and the parishioners worshipped at Sts. Peter and Paul until a new building was erected on the Old French church site. The new building, opened in 1997, incorporated many artifacts from the original three ethnic parishes. It is highly likely that members of the new parish have familial roots in the previous three parishes of Duluth's west end.

Next Time: Dorothy Vigor Fleming's memories of life as an Iron Range French Canadian. Also, information on Franco American websites.

Société Updates

- ◆ **New Address** ... Dick Bernard's new email address is: dick@chez-nous.net. And, don't forget to check out **Dick's new web site** at www.chez-nous.net. This is a personal site, not an official one for LSCF.
- ◆ Has anyone found the key to the St. Louis Parish hall and cabinet? Please contact Dick if you have.
- ◆ We're sad to report that **John Rivard's** eye surgery was not successful. We know you'll send him your thoughts and prayers for a speedy recovery from the surgery. He is his usual cheerful self, never defeated by the bumps and scrapes of life.
- ◆ "Bonjour Minnesota" is on each Wednesday from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Fresh Air Radio, KFAI 90.3 FM and KFAI 106.7 FM.
- ◆ The next LSCF community event is our **Mardi Gras** potluck on Monday, 6 March, at 7 p.m. at St. Louis King of France Church hall in St. Paul. Come one, come all!
- ◆ 4-7 May is St. Paul **Festival of Nations**, and LSCF will again be involved. We need volunteers. Please contact Marie Nolin Nichols at 651-578-2517 or Sera Byrne at 651-224-2636.
- ◆ The **Christmas party** was a great success. The organizers say that "everyone enjoyed the good food, good company, and good friends." Many people contributed to the success of the evening, including Amy, Nicole, and Michelle Jensen, Ellen Byrne, Simone Germain, John England, Leroy Dubois, Mark Labine (who played Père Noel) and all the children who sang "Frosty the Snowman" so wonderfully. Among the companies and organizations donating prizes were Hotel Sofitel (\$50 gift certificate); Walgreens (\$15 gift certificate); Arby's (two dinner-for-two gift certificates); WCCO-TV for donating a T-shirt; McDonalds Restaurants (15 \$1 gift certificates for Père Noel gifts); Mark Labine and family for the mystery gift; Renée Juairé for donating an appliance timer and a silk poinsettia plant; LSCF for donating a sweatshirt, two T-shirts and a dual flag pin! **Very special thanks** to Renée Juairé and Seraphine Byrne, who organized the party, Judy Labine for helping out, and Les Canadiens Errants, who sang.

We recognize the passing of two members of La Société Canadienne-Française:

Long-time LSCF member **Vernon LaBrosse**, age 82, of West St. Paul, died on December 27, 1999. He is survived by eight children, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His son, George, has long been active in La Société and can be reached at 919 North Shore Drive, Forest Lake, Minnesota 55025.

Navy Chief **Duane Rivard** passed away December 24, 1998 at the age of 68. He was baptized at Our Lady of Lourdes, Minneapolis, on December 12, 1930. His wife, Fran Rivard, writes that Duane was very proud to be of French-Canadian ancestry, and of his service in the United States Navy. Those with access to the internet can find a brief biography and photo of Duane at www.lonesailor.org. Fran can be reached at Epiphany Pines, Apartment 120, 1800 11th Avenue NW, Coon Rapids, MN 55433.

Le Forum

If you haven't already seen it, the Franco American newspaper, "**Le Forum**", produced at the University of Maine at Orono, is well worth your investigation. In French and English, it comes out six times yearly for \$15. Send check to the Franco American Center, 164 College Avenue, Orono, ME 04473. Enjoy the thoughts and memories of our New England cousins!

You might be interested . . .

Margaret Vashro (Vacherau) Gornick of 3441 Pilgrim Lane, Plymouth, Minnesota 55441 wrote on October 8, 1999 with her comments about general changes in the Catholic Church. While her comments are not of an historical nature, rather about her philosophical beliefs about changes in the church, they may well be of interest to readers. If you wish a copy of her letter, please send \$1.00 and a self-addressed envelope to Dick Bernard, 7632 157th Street W, #301, Apple Valley, MN 55124.

Please, send us *your* memories.



Highly recommended: A 1997 book called *Death of the Dream: Farmhouses in the Midwest* by William G. Gabler, describes the old homesteads beautifully with many powerful photographs.



Highly recommended: "Franco Americans: We Remember", a video from New Hampshire Public Television. It features many poignant recollections from some of the most important leaders of Franco American activism, scholarship, and entertainment in New England, including Claire Quintal, Julien Olivier, Josée Vachon, and many others. Length is 60 minutes, cost is \$19.95 plus \$3 for shipping. Order toll-free at 1-800-20NHPTV. Their web site is www.nhptv.org.

Please . . .

We ask your help in recruiting new members to the Société. Annual dues are:

Family:	\$18.00
Senior (62+)	\$12.00
Senior Couple	\$15.00
Single	\$15.00

Make out checks to LSCF and mail to:

John England, Treasurer
2002 Palace Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105

A hearty *merci!* to all of you who renewed your memberships for 2000, especially to the significant number who added a few extra dollars to help out with expenses. We are a small, shoe-string organization, and the help of everyone, physical, financial, and moral, is deeply appreciated!



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