

# Chez Nous

The newsletter of

La Société

Canadienne Française du Minnesota

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*Joyeux Noël. Bonne et Heureuse Année.* Scenes from La Société's annual Christmas potluck, December 1, 2000, at St. Louis Catholic Church in St. Paul. A great time was had by all. At lower left, Pere Noel (aka Ralph Germain), distributed gifts to the children; lower right, Les Canadiens Errants shared songs of the season in French.

### Four stories of Faith

We offer here four separate vignettes about the faith of our French-Canadian and French ancestors.

We are particularly interested in your stories, especially about Nuns who were your teachers. Send to Dick Bernard, editor, 6905 Romeo Road, Woodbury MN 55125-2421.

### Marguerite Bourgeoys... Spiritual "Star" of Our Past

As interpreted by Eileen Clarkin, C.N.D.

(Reprinted from Sisters Today, March 2000 pp 120-21, Order of St. Benedict, St. Joseph MN. Sister Eileen Clarkin is a member of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Her congregation was the first uncloistered community of women in the New World. Sister Eileen Clarkin lives in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada.)

I am a woman of 17<sup>th</sup> century France, a product of my time marked by much social, political, and religious unrest.

In 1653 I left my native town of Troyes to follow the "STAR" in my heart. My name is Marguerite Bourgeoys.

Often, as a young woman, I listened as people spoke to me of Canada, and I was drawn to go there.

Deep within me was a dream that one day there would be a company of women who would honor the life that Mary led during her time on earth, and that this company would be formed in Ville Marie, present day Montreal.

Like Mary, we would be free to go about, uncloistered, with a "STAR" in our hearts, being women of "Visitation" among the settlers and native people of Ville Marie.

Wisdom, my trusted friend and guide, walked with me through years of waiting, searching, waiting until the time was ripe to give shape to my dream. She was a source of courage and strength on my pathway to an unknown future, in my desire to follow the "STAR" in my heart.

A door opened wide when I met the founder of Ville Marie, Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve, then in Troyes, to find a woman willing to care for the educational needs in Ville Marie. To my surprise I suddenly recognized him as a man that I had already met in my dreams. I offered to go and he accepted me.

O Spirit of Wisdom, what are you asking of me? To leave all? To really go? To make such a vast ocean-crossing, so symbolic and real?

Even while doubts, concerns, fears haunted me I heard the reassuring voice of a woman saying, "Go, I

will never abandon you!" I knew it was the voice of Mary, of Wisdom. This gave me great courage for my journey. It was a perilous crossing on an infested ship. In cold November we arrived at Ville Marie, a small outpost on the St. Lawrence River.

With Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve and my woman friend, Jeanne Mance, we shared hardships, challenges, hopes, and dreams, weaving with others a web of life with dark threads of pain and struggle, and brighter strands of joy and trust, deeply aware of the Wisdom of God alive and active among us.

The cost of our fidelity was 40 years of resistance to having a cloistered lifestyle imposed on us that would go contrary to the spirit and vision that was the gift of the "STAR" in my heart.

It was a long struggle that ended happily just two years before my final journey home to God on January 12, 1700, three centuries ago.

To my great surprise, I was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 31, 1982.

The "STAR" in my heart still shines in this company of women, Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, as they respond to the needs of people in Canada, United States, Japan, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Paraguay, France, and Cameroon, Africa.

It is truly a history-held-mystery that holds within it my desire to be a spiritual "STAR" in the hearts of other young women who experience a nudge from God to risk being members of my company, as together we help shape its future and be a sign of God's light and love in the new millenium.

### St. Margaret Bourgeoys Foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame de Montreal (1620-1700)

From the excellent daily meditation book, All Saints, by Robert Ellsberg. Crossroads Publishing, 1997

*"I want at all costs not only to love my neighbor,  
but to keep him in love for me."*

St Marguerite was born in the French town of Troyes in 1620. When she was 20 she applied in turn to the local convent of the Carmelites and then the Poor Clares. Providentially, she was refused by both. Nevertheless, her sense of religious calling remained intact, fortified by a vision of the Holy Child which, she said, "forever turned my eyes from the beauty of this world..". To her local confessor she made private vows of poverty and chastity.

In 1652 Marguerite heard that the governor of the French colony in Montreal was seeking a

schoolmistress. She immediately volunteered, recognizing an opportunity to help implant the gospel in the New World. A year later she was in Montreal at the time no more than a primitive fort enclosing a settlement of about two hundred persons. There were as yet few children to teach, and it would be several years before the first school house was constructed. But she occupied herself in the meantime with a range of charitable activities and worked hard to promote the religious life of the colony.

Marguerite endured poverty, cold, hunger, and the persistent perils of war in her early years on the frontier. But as Montreal steadily grew in size, so also the conception of her vocation expanded. Through several trips to France she recruited women to join her in starting a missionary congregation dedicated to education. She had a particular interest in providing schooling for the Indians.

Though her project was warmly supported by the civil authorities, she ran into obstacles from the bishop of Quebec. He thought her small band of postulants should affiliate with the Ursulines. Marguerite, however, was determined that her congregation remain uncloistered. Asked why, her answer was that the Virgin Mary did not live in the cloister: "True it is that the cloister is a protection, but could we find a more powerful guardian than the Mother to whom the Eternal Father confided the Sacred Humanity of his Divine Son?" Finally she prevailed. In 1676 the Congregation of Notre Dame was officially established. It was the first unenclosed foreign-missionary community for women in the church.

Marguerite Bourgeoys was the first superior of the congregation, a post she retained until the age of seventy-three. After much hardship and suffering she had seen her congregation thrive, and now she was content to retire from center stage. On December 31, 1699, she learned that the young novice mistress, Sister Agnes, was deathly ill. She responded by praying, "Dear Lord, why dost thou not take me, a useless member in the house, rather than this poor Sister who could still do so much for Thee?" Almost immediately Sister Agnes rallied, while Mother Marguerite began to fail. She died in 1700 on January 12 (now her feast day).

See: Elizabeth F. Butler, *the Life of Venerable Marguerite Bourgeoys* (New York; P.J.Kenedy & Sons 1932)

## Holy Hill Shrine of Mary

by Lee Resch

from the Country Gazette Nov-Dec 1998  
(Holy Hill is near Hubertus, in SE Wisconsin)

The monk Francois Soubris walked and walked, the leather flask of water at his side empty for the last day, and the pack on his back wearing a welt in his flesh.

It was the 1800s. His feet burned on the soil as he continued his journey to the ... peak of the consecrated hill, one of the highest spots in the area. It would, in the future, be known as Holy Hill. His homeland of France was far, far away. Francois Soubris longed for the comfort of his past but he knew he could never go home, not after the unforgivable sin he had committed. He knew better things lay ahead of him...if only he could make it.

He let his feet burn. He felt in his heart that he deserved every minute of the pain for what he had done. Then, with a sudden shudder and a palsy-like quiver, his legs gave out. It was no use. There was no feeling in his legs. They seemed to have forgotten how to walk. He was paralyzed.

According to legend, the monk climbed the rest of the way to the top of the hill on his hands and knees. After spending the night in prayer, he recovered the use of his limbs.

That was the first of man miracles believed to have happened on Holy Hill. Right on County P along a scenic, rolling valley, through swamps of tamarack and cedar, up into the large, rounded mounds of the Kettle Moraine, stands Holy Hill. At almost eight miles, the highway reaches the hill crest with its castle-like church and Holy Hill Monastery of the Carmelite Fathers. Many tales center on this shrine.

Francois Soubris had committed an act that few people could understand - he had murdered his lover.

The Frenchman was born into a family of high standing. They groomed him toward the priesthood, and expectations ran high that Soubris would make them proud.

But while at the monastery in the valleys of France, he found himself enamoured of a young lady from the area. He fell head over heels in love. He fell away from the church, and he shunned his family's plans for him to be a priest. He became openly betrothed to the woman. The community scorned him.

Wrenched and torn between his love for the woman and his passion for the Lord, he called off the engagement.

One year later, he returned to his lover. But it was too late. She had turned cold.

And in a fit of insane passion, he slew her.

Francois Soubbris was to remain tortured for many years for his faithlessness to his vows and to his sin of murder. He had sought refuge and atonement in America, landing at Quebec, where he became a recluse at one of the old monasteries.

From Quebec, he worked his way down into the United States. He ended up in Chicago. It was there that he read a diary written by Father Marquette, who, during the summer and autumn of 1673, had journeyed to find the Fox River, with his partner, Louis Joliet.

In Father Marquette's diary, Soubbris found reference to a wooden cross erected at Holy Hill near Hubertus. Soubbris knew that he had found his calling. He would make it his mission in life to re-erect the holy ground and once again make it the sacred spot that Father Hennepin had hoped it would become.

On the spot where his paralysis was supposedly cured, Soubbris built a makeshift chapel where he prayed several times a day. People started hearing of his cure, and they traveled to the site to seek their own cures. Soubbris stayed on the hill for quite some time. Farmers from neighboring farms saw the unusual sight of a man bent in prayer and penance on the hill. News spread throughout the area of an unusual man living on the hill, inside a cave in the woods.

Soubbris stayed at the site for seven years before mysteriously vanishing. According to old legends, the ghost of Soubbris can still be seen kneeling in front of the crosses.

In 1855, the Rev. Francis Paulhuber bought the land and later built a log chapel on the brow of the hill. Today, his original building has been replaced by one of brick. A brick church also sits atop the summit like a regal crown.

Along the winding lane leading to the crest are 14 Stations of the Cross, before which the devout kneel in prayer on their way to the shrine. The origin of the Carmelite Order was very simple. Near the middle of the twelfth century, after the victory of the Crusaders in Palestine and the recapture of the Holy Places, a group of pious pilgrims settled on Mount Carmel to lead an eremitical life in imitation of the Prophet Elijah who, with his followers, had made their homes in and around the rock formations of the mountain, centuries before Christ. Passion and renunciation of the goods of the world characterized this great and pious man. The main elements of Elijah's life, totally dedicated to God (solitude, penance, prayer and contemplation)

became the way of life for the first Carmelites. His provoking challenge to the wavering people of Israel, "How long will you straddle the issue? If the Lord is God, follow Him..." continues to inspire his contemporary sons and daughters to unequivocally renounce the world and "seek the things that are above."

The Discalced Carmelite Order is a Roman Catholic Religious Order founded by St. Teresa of Avila.

Discalced is a word that means "unshod" or "barefoot." It is a symbol of reform, according to Father Cyril Guise, shrine director at Holy Hill. He has been a Discalced Carmelite friar for 48 years. St. Teresa's great work of reform began with herself. She made a vow always to follow the most perfect course, and resolved to keep the rule as perfectly as she could. A group of nuns gathered in her cell one September evening in 1560, inspired by the primitive tradition of Carmel and the discalced reform of St. Peter of Alcantara, proposed building a monastery of an eremitical type.

On August 24, 1562, the new monastery dedicated to St. Joseph was founded.

They founded the first convent of Discalced Brethren in November 1568. The Discalced Carmelites living at Holy Hill today are descendants of that order.

"There are so many different ways you can look at Holy Hill," Father Guise said. "It is a very important part of Wisconsin." Its image was used on billboards several years ago as a landmark in the state of Wisconsin, he pointed out.

Although Holy Hill became a place of worship as a Catholic shrine, the Catholics were not the first to pray there. "Menominee and Potawatomi Indians used to worship here before that," Guise said. "It's the highest hill in southeastern Wisconsin."

At one time, the hill was 60 feet higher. That amount was taken off the top in order to build the present-day brick church there in 1926. Before the church was built, a log cabin chapel stood there. And before that stood the white oak cross put there by Francois Soubbris. A gift shop at the base of the hill offers guests tangible memories of their visit. Meals can be had in the restaurant located in the Old Monastery Inn.

Today, eighteen friars live on the premises.

There are Discalced Carmelite monasteries in Boston, Washington, West Virginia, Milwaukee and California.

Today, some 500,000 visitors come to Holy Hill each year. Guests are welcome 52 weeks of the year.

"They come to pray, they come to be alone and to meditate. They roam through the woods, ponder and reflect on their own lives and deepen their relationship with Almighty God, or to develop a greater love and devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus," Guise said.

### The Three Wishes: A Quaint Legend of the Canadian Habitants.

as related by Charles Skinner

Journal of American Folklore, Oct-Dec 1906.

Merci beaucoup to Treffe Daniels,

LSCF member, who discovered this item in the University of Minnesota Library.

There are in some of the Canadian-French folk tales a simplicity and unconsciousness of daring the beliefs and conventions that take one's breath away. We see no impropriety in records of the visits of Greek and Roman gods to the people of our planet, as in the myth of Philemon and Baucis, but when the heavens of our own faith draw into close relation with the earth, the effect is a trifle startling. Yet the habitant sees nothing strange or irreverent in his folk-lore, and, after all, the impression produced by it depends on mental habit and the point of view. The familiar introduction of the Deity as a character in stories of French Canada implies no irreverence. It is common to all unschooled people, especially to those who worship the Virgin as the highest of the heavenly powers, Christ as the next important, and the Creator as even less of consequence than the interceding saints. Hence, one must read this story with a mind as free as possible from local or creed bias. It is a tale of a shepherd's wishes, told by rustics of the old dominion that borders the St. Lawrence below Quebec; and here it is: -

On one of their visits to the world, to see how mankind was faring, God and St. Peter reached Canada. They were in disguise, and as they walked together beside the St. Lawrence they came upon a shepherd, tending a flock on one of the rocky hillsides. He seemed an honest, faithful lad, and they questioned him curiously as to his way of life, and his hopes and aims. He confessed, in answer to their inquiries, that he wished but three things.

Pleased to find a man who was so near content in the earth he had so filled with good and beauty, the Deity exclaimed, "Name them. They shall be yours."

"I hardly think so," replied the shepherd, "for no man could give me what I want."

"Yet, name them," insisted God.

"Well, then: a pipe that shall always be full when I want a smoke; a set of dice that shall always

win for me when I gamble; and a bag that anything I want will jump into, and stay as long as I please."

"Your wishes are granted," said God.

"No, no!" cried St. Peter. "The fellow should wish for heaven, and more faith."

"His wish is granted," repeated God decisively, and St. Peter walked on, grumbling.

The perplexity in which the shepherd looked after the retreating figures was increased tenfold when, on glancing down, he found on the earth at his feet, a large pipe filled with tobacco, a box of dice, and a leather bag like a small valise. He had seen no such things in the hands of the visitors and they certainly had not been there before. Cautiously, for these might be witch gifts, he examined the objects. They did not burn his fingers. He pulled out his flint and steel, and struck a light for the pipe. Ha! Never in his life had he smoked such tobacco. It was a divine weed, indeed! And the miracle of it! The tobacco burned, yet it did not waste: the pipe remained full!

That evening the shepherd went to the nearest village and tried his new dice. They won for him at every throw, so that he left for home with his fingers playing pleasantly about a pocketful of small coin, - enough to buy several glasses of spirits. His successes on that night started him on a career of such moderate dissipation as a little French village could afford; he smoked all day, and he was at the gaming table every evening. Many heads were shaken, for it was feared that Pierre was coming to an evil end. There was one, however, who watched his lapse into ways of sin with delight. It was the Devil. When the shepherd's conduct had become almost a scandal to the neighborhood, Satan made bold to present himself, and ask that their relations might be more intimate and mutually profitable. Though startled by this proposition, the rustic did not lose his head. After a long stare at the stranger, which comprised his spiked tail and his cloven hoof, Pierre raised a whoop of exultation, and shouted, "I wish the Devil into the bag!"

There was no help for it. In went his wicked majesty, horns, hoof, and tail, bellowing vainly his protest and astonishment. Closing the bag with a snap, the countryman caught it up, ran to the blacksmith shop, rousing his friends along the way with joyful cries of, "I've caught the Devil! I've caught the Devil!" and, placing the bag on the anvil, he and the smith pounded it with hammers till the Evil One was beaten out as flat as a pancake. This proceeding was to the joy of the whole public, and it was admitted that the shepherd's wrong-doing had produced only the best results.

**Merci beaucoup!** We wish to thank all of the following people who helped LSCF Christmas part be a huge success. Laurels go out to: Seraphine Byrne, Amy Jensen, Nicole Jensen and others for decorating the hall and preparing the tables and the delicious food. Thank you to Ralph Germain, for playing the Voyageur Pere Noel. Thank you to all the children who sang "Jolly Old St. Nicholas" so wonderfully and also for being so well behaved. We also wish to thank the following companies and people for donating door prizes: Hotel Sofitel, which donated a gift certificate for a one night Weekend Superbe for two; Walgreen's Drug Store which donated a \$20 merchandise gift certificate; LSCF for donating a sweatshirt; Arby's Restaurants which donated two dinner for two gift certificates; Hardee's Restaurant which donated ten \$1.00 gift certificates for Pere Noel gifts. Thank you to John England and Seraphine Byrne for diligently checking the post office box. Also, thank you to Les Canadiens Errants for providing the entertainment and sing along. Last, but not least, our utmost thank you to Seraphine Byrne and Renee Juare, who organized the party. We believe everyone enjoyed the good food, good company and good friends.

**Upcoming Events:** Saturday, February 24, 6:00 p.m. is our annual **Mardi Gras potluck** at St. Louis Church in St. Paul, Mass at 5 p.m. for those interested. **NOTE: this is a change in day and time. May 3-6, Festival of Nations, St. Paul.** We will again have a booth, and we need volunteers. This year's theme: costumes. Please help out in any way you can. Call Marie Nolin Nichols, 651-578-2517. **Monday, June 4, 7 p.m. is our annual meeting** at St. Louis Catholic Church. **June 23: St. Jean-Baptiste Day** and the date of our picnic/celebration. Details later.



MINNESOTA  
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COMMISSION

**Our great thanks to the Minnesota Humanities Commission (MHC)** for a \$1000 grant to LSCF to help with newsletter and other program costs for 2000-2001. This grant has been a great benefit for you, a supplement to your dues, and makes it possible for us to do a better job of reaching out to members, as well as keeping connected with other organizations. MHC, and it's cooperating organizations, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature, deserve your notes of thanks. MHC's address: 987 East Ivy Avenue, St. Paul 55106, 651-774-0105.



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## COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: REFLECTIONS

by John Cote

We French-Canadians pride ourselves on our dual racial background: first are our ancient roots in France that our immigrant ancestors left, coming to a new world to seek a new life as long ago as almost 400 years. The second racial background is being known as Canadien - either born in Canada (usually Quebec province) or the parents born in Canada, then migrated elsewhere.

Because of our ethnic ties the majority of families of Canadiens/French were, and many still are, bilingual and many have affinities for languages and arts amongst other traits.

The Canadien-French connection and the province of Quebec, the stronghold of the French Canadians, included children of immigrants or within two generations from France in most cases. Many were born in Canada and thus authentic French-Canadians known as "pure Laine" (Pure wool), a term of distinction and endearment, but at times used in the negative manner to poke fun at the true Habitants.

A few lucky families claim an even stronger tie to our French heritage due to our immigrant father or grandfather serving overseas in France in WWI with the American Expeditionary Forces, later returning with a French bride. I was from such a family. My father, John Cote (9<sup>th</sup> generation in North America) found a fair French flower, Genevieve Conseil, married her, both coming back to the U.S. She, the immigrant and adoptee, had to begin a new life in an adopted country far away from the natal hearth and home. Time came for being brave to leave all and go forward into the unknown. Braving perils not thought of until the dream is achieved, the prize awarded.

### The Family of John Cote

In my family in Moosup CT we were brought up as part of three cultures under three flags, all of equal

importance to us. Yes, we, my family, could claim three cultures in which we were raised: father's Canadian; mother's as a French WWI war bride; and U.S.

We grew up under quite severe restricted rules, steeped in the customs and rules of the family, civil authorities and church hierarchy. The old folks set the tone - law - insured that things got done the proper way and we grew up under the old folks rules and adapted well to the customs and had to acculturate ourselves to strange and not understood new forces when we ventured outside of the "French town" enclosure. We had to work in a different culture and being a minority with no power were actually second class citizens at the mercy of the non-Canadiens. They even coined names to denote who we were: "Frogs", "Frenchy's", "Canuck", "Pierre", "Batisse", etc. More names than one can remember were used.

My paternal ancestor Jean Cote-Coste, from Mortagne, Normandie, France, was one of seven Habitants of Robert Gifford, sieur de Beauport. He landed at Quebec June 4, 1634, to go up river to settle his land grant before winter set in. A loop of the family circle was now formed from Normandie to Canada, remaining open until 1917, 283 years later.



John Cote, identifying his photo on the wall of Knights leaders at KC hall, March, 1998



My mother Genevieve Plamyre Conseil (1902-1972) was born in Charlesville, Ardennes, France; married Jean F. Cote 7 June 1919 at Cote d'Or, France; came to U.S. in September, 1919 as an immigrant and war bride - one of 3,000 aboard the U.S. transport ship Mt. Vernon.. With her new husband, Genevieve spent 10 days at sea voyaging to her new country of adoption. Landfall was at Hoboken NJ. John was processed and discharged and given \$67 traveling pay to his home of enlistment, Moosup CT.

Genevieve, a war bride, and immigrant to a new land, had arrived at her new and future home with all it's wonders and faults.

#### Adapting and remembering.

From the time she arrived in the United States, Genevieve went to night school with other war brides to learn English, civics, etc., to prepare for becoming a citizen.

Both my mother and father, the Canadian immigrant John Cote and the French immigrant Genevieve Conseil Cote, coming to the States in 1899 and 1919 respectively, had to acculturate themselves to their new country while their children accepted as normal growing up as Americans, while living in the traditions of our Canadian French families far away.

We children also learned English as only French was spoken in the house. In our town were three other French war brides and Genevieve frequently got together with them. In so doing they were like our French family and known as the "French aunts". At my parents 50<sup>th</sup>

wedding anniversary, a Therese LeHoux told me that she used to change my diapers. So from these French Aunts we learned about our beloved France, our third country.

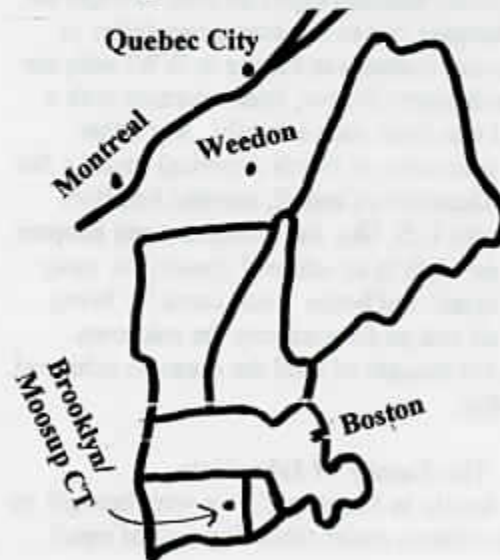
From Fathers side we learned about Canada and the farm of our grandparents, even our great grandfather, Jean Batisse (1810-1906). Faintly down the long years we always felt a tug at the heartstrings by our French connections and far away family. Is it strange that at times we wander and struggle to belong to one country instead of heeding the call, feeling the tug of our parents natal land calling us back to our ancestral home? Could it be possible that this allegiance to three countries at times causes us to pause and reflect on how fortunate we are to know, love and respect our parents countries and also do our duty to the country of our birth, the United States of America. Does it not give us pause at times to wonder and albeit confuse us as to where our allegiance lies?

#### From Canada to the United States to the Great War, France and home again..

Moving forward from the first ancestor in Canada (1634) to 1917, Jean F. Cote, 9<sup>th</sup> generation, enlisted in the U.S. Army April, 1917, and in September crossed the Atlantic, landing at Brest and thus closed the other loop of one circle his ancestors formed.

Jean 9<sup>th</sup> was born in Weedon Quebec 11 Nov 1893 and came to the U.S. about 1899 when his father and family came back to the U.S. and plied Jean 8's trade as butcher and shopkeeper.

Time rolled on - the great war of 1914-18 drained an entire generation in the trenches of the Marne, of England, France, Germany, etc. John 9<sup>th</sup> was bilingual and soon put to work as interpreter, a relatively pleasant and easy duty. Also, as a medic, he took part in the Belleau Woods, Chateau Thierry and 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive of the Meuse Argonne and was stationed in a field hospital





ary near the front lines, with his duties as litter bearer.

As the U.S. troops were being shipped home, Jean 9th remained as a member of the Army of Occupation serving as Surgeons Assistant and interpreter due to a shortage of medics to care for the wounded.

He finally served in the U.S. Hospital in Il-sur-tille near Dijon in the Cote d'or region southeast of Paris.

There he made friends with Jules Buchler, married to Louise Conseil. Many times Jean and Jules enjoyed home cooked meals on Sundays.

Sometime in 1918-1919 he met Louise's younger sister, Genevieve, who was visiting Buchler's, and helping her sister, who was ill.



Genevieve Conseil (at left) with friends,  
Undated, in France.

A strange coincidence occurred in Novembre, 1918. The Armistice was signed at 11 a.m. 11 Novembre 1918; on that date John turned 25. An even stranger event happened in 1945, Aout 14, when John's eldest daughter Jacqueline also turned 25 when WWII ended. She was born 14 Aug 1920 - WWII VJ Day 14 Aout 1945, Kismet, Destiny?? Strange but true. Completing the circle.

We left the ancestor in Quebec at the opening of this tale and a circle is still uncompleted. With Jean 9th in France we can now consider the first circle closed and completed.

### Genevieve Conseil

Genevieve's tale is also evocative and interesting.

Genevieve was the youngest of four daughters born 20 June 1902 in Charlesville France, Ardennes region. Her older sisters were Louise, Antoinette and Aime. Her mother died in 1906 of pneumonia, thus leaving the four children motherless. Her father was a brush maker (hair, clothes, etc). An Aunt named Gabriel became their mother. Another Aunt was Mother Superior of a Convent where she was educated. In 1914, when she was 12 years old, war broke out and the convent and all were evacuated by military transport as the Boches were fast approaching according to the German's Schifflen battle plan. Genevieve was sent to live with a family in Dijon south of Paris and worked in a dress shop putting pretty ribbons around packages. Once again she was alone with no immediate family to assist her. Her father was in the Army somewhere on the front. He was wounded, and convalesced in Paris where he finally met his daughter after three years separation.

A while later, March 1919, Genevieve's father met his future son in law, listened as he asked for her hand in marriage, gave his blessings but requested that a letter be sent from Moosup CT by the Nuns verifying John's family reputation, honesty, etc. The Nuns of the "Order of the Holy Ghost" also had a branch in Charlesville and were thus well known to Pere Conseil. The letter stated that John's "family is of good repute, honorable, Catholic and will receive her with open arms."

With the letter in hand, assurances accepted, permission was given and arrangements made for this marriage. The military granted permission, family blessed and agreed. The fateful day of 7 June 1919 at the Town Hall, John and Genevieve were married. Then to L'eglise St. Roch at Larrey (Cote d'Or) to bless the nuptials and later the reception held.

The bride was now U.S. government property and her life now had a purpose and direction.

In September 1919 orders were issued directing John and Genevieve to report to Brest to embark on the Mt. Vernon transport ship for transportation to United States. (Note: the Mt. Vernon was a German war prize, the Crown Princess Cecilia.) After a 12 day voyage, including a severe storm, John and Genevieve disembarked at Hoboken New Jersey. John mustered out, with \$67 travel pay, and they returned to his place of enlistment, Moosup CT, where they settled down, and raised a family.



Larrey (Côte-d'Or). — Intérieur de l'Eglise Saint-Roch.



LARREY (Côte-d'Or). - L'Eglise

**L'Eglise St. Roch, Larrey, Cote d'Or, place of blessing of the vows of John and Genevieve.**

**A generation passes**

Only days after 50 years married to his French Bride, John passed away 25 June, 1969.

Thus John, immigrant to the U.S., closed another circle far from his birth country but also closed the ancestors circle who also was an immigrant from France to Canada. He was buried in Connecticut far from his natal country of French Canada.

Genevieve passed away 22 August 1972 and was buried with her husband in the family plot. She also was/is an immigrant who finally closed the final circle, leaving her natal home France, to remain forever away from her family. But both John and Genevieve are asleep together in their adopted land, always together as it should be.

**Reflection**

I am proud of my heritage, steeped and raised in three cultures, acculturated in the social milieu as an

American, lived, worked and made my mark in this American culture, but ever having a faint call, insistence, wooing and reminding me that we also are immigrants, well adapted to the American way of life. But deep down our heart strings throb to the call of our true nationality, Canadian and French.

Fortunately we were brought up in the Canadian manner, spoke French, followed the Canadian and French modes, life and were inculcated with a fierce pride of our families. Often at night after evening meal, schoolwork and chores our mother would tell us tales, teach us songs, and relate stories of her family, the Conseils. From letters received with pictures we got to know our French cousins very well. As to our Canadian side, every Sunday we would visit Grandma and learn about our Canadian family and their forebears, thus we had a chance to be well acquainted with both families.

As a result of being exposed to Canadian and French tales, cultures, food, etc., we have had a wonderful enriched education in Franco-American. The major benefit is that we are all bilingual in French and English, which is not universal in families like ours. We can translate either way, read, write, etc. While in the service, many times my fluency in French was useful when we deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, as part of NATO's 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet. So this heritage was not a waste.

### John Cote

John is no stranger to the pages of Chez Nous. A great friend and relative who I met in the late 1980s, he has contributed long articles about his family (Aout-Septembre, 1991 and Janvier-Fevrier, 1997), plus several shorter articles over the years. He and his spouse, Jeannette, are very special people, parents and grandparents.

I learned of John through Tom LaForest's *Nos Ancetres*, Volume VI (1988), while researching my Cote roots in the 1980s. We not only share Cote and Collette roots, we have been great friends ever since, and I have experienced he and Jeanette's hospitality on four separate occasions.

John has been exceptionally active in his community. He followed his father's footsteps into the American Legion, and has been a member of the Legion since 1946. A 50 year Knight of Columbus, he has held all of the offices in the area KC's. For 43 years he has been an extremely active volunteer in the Boy Scouts, especially with Eagle Scouts. He is a tireless researcher of family history. The old saying "no grass grows under his feet" is apropos to John Cote. He is passionate about his roots, his nativity, his culture....

So, John, a salute to you: a great and abiding friend and relative. Merci beaucoup!

John can be reached at 311 Providence Road, Brooklyn CT 06234.

Dick Bernard, editor, Chez Nous



The Cote's, March, 1998, Clockwise from 12:00:  
John & Jeanette, Maurice, & Paulette Gagne.

### John and Genevieve Cote's famille:

**Jacqueline Yvette Graden**, born 14 Aout 1920; passed away 1995. Married, one son and two grandsons.

**John F. Cote** (author of this article); born 7 Octobre 1921; married Jeannete Beausoleil 7 Juin 1947. Both families grandparents had known each other in Canada: John and Jeanette were grammar school sweethearts. John enlisted in the Navy in September, 1939, and became a career submariner. Assigned to Pearl Harbor October, 1940, he was a Pearl Harbor survivor 7 Decembre 1941. He spent over 20 years with the submarines, and after retirement took another job back home in CT. Cote's have a son and two grandchildren.

**Maurice P. Cote** was born 2 Avril 1923. Maurice never married.

**Paulette Lucienne Gagne** was born 25 Octobre 1925, is married and has six children, and many grand and great-grandchildren.

Regretfully, John notes that the family photos were all lost in a house fire in the 1930s, so a pictorial record is lacking.

John Cote's story about his family is another of many examples of the wonderful stories held by our members and others - stories which beg to be shared. Your own family stories are solicited, always. If you have a story, send it in. Don't worry about grammar or the like. We can help with that. What we cannot do is tell your story. It has to come from you.

Mail your story, and/or photos to Dick Bernard, editor of Chez Nous, 6905 Romeo Road, Woodbury MN 55125-2421. Or you can send an e-mail to [Dick@chez-nous.net](mailto:Dick@chez-nous.net). Let us hear from you.

Also, invite others to become a member of LaSociete. Dues are \$18 for family; \$15 for single, or senior couple; \$12 for seniors. Checks to LSCF, send to John England, 2002 Palace Ave, St. Paul, MN 55105.

The **ANNUAL MEETING** of La Societe C-F is Monday, June 4, 7 p.m. at St. Louis Church, St. Paul. This is a very important meeting. See enclosed letter from the president of La Societe.

**FESTIVAL OF NATIONS** is May 3-6 in St. Paul. As we have for many years, La Societe C-F will design and staff the French-Canadian booth. We need your help.

This year's theme is costumes and accouterments. If you have items such as hats, etc., worn by French-Canadian men and women, which you think would be of interest to those attending the Festival, let us know.

We also need volunteers to staff the booth for periods of about four hours (less if that is too long for you). Volunteers will receive a free admission ticket and a chance for the drawing

**Call Sera Byrne at 651-436-1678 if you have costumes to suggest, or if you can volunteer.** If she is not at the phone, please leave a message.

The following is the Festival schedule, and our needs for assistance.

- Can you help set up our exhibit before May 3?
- May 3 and 4, Thursday (9 to 3) and Friday (9 to 4), are for school children and an enjoyable time to work.
- May 4-6, (Friday (4 to 11), Saturday (10 to 10), and Sunday (11 to 7) are open to the public.
- Whoever works the last shift on Sunday, will be asked to help take down the exhibit.

Again, let Sera hear from you. 651-436-1678. Merci.

**FESTIVAL DU ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE** is Saturday evening, June 23, at Sibley House in Mendota. This is the fifth annual celebration of Quebec's patron saint. Every year has been better. Do plan to attend. Tell your friends.

Your Board has decided that there will be no summer picnic this year. The Board also decided to contribute \$100 to the French camp of Concordia Language Villages, and to authorize up to \$200 to assist Sibley House in the St. Jean Baptiste eve activities June 23.



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# Chez Nous

The newsletter of

La Société

Canadienne Française du Minnesota

Mai-Juin 2001

Elway Station PO Box 16583 St. Paul 55116-0583

Vol. 23, No. 3, Issue 125

## The Voyageur

Pages 2-5 of this issue recount the tale of an intrepid Voyageur, Louis Durand. We are grateful to Mike Durand and the Durand Heritage Foundation for permission to use this article.

While Voyageurs were but a tiny percentage of the retinue of settlers called French-Canadian, they loom very, very large as symbols of our heritage. Images of Voyageurs are very common in this region - what they symbolize is in the eye of the beholder: perhaps freedom, adventure, fun....

I don't view them in quite the same way.

To me, almost since the beginning, I viewed the Voyageur as the kindred spirit of the railroad section gang member; the oilfield roustabout; the tramp steamer crew member; the carnie who moved with the flea-bitten circus from small town to small town.

None of these jobs struck me as particularly romantic: unremittingly hard and unglamorous work under often awful conditions; risks to life and limb; opportunities to blow whatever one had earned on the traditional vices, then back to the grind again.

As with the section hands, etc., some Voyageurs aspired to and achieved great success. But for most, the job of Voyageur was but a job, and an early and death was not uncommon.

From the time the ice left the northern lakes and rivers; to the time they froze over again, the Voyageur canoes were out in force in the roadless outback that was this country 200 and more years ago. For some reason, when I think of Voyageurs I think of "mosquitoes" or black flies, ready for a tasty meal on their helpless victim! No "Backwoods Off" in those days!

Still, the Voyageur cuts a fancy figure in our lore, and I proudly number at least one, great-great grandfather Simeon Blondeau, amongst my ancestors.

So, here, hats off to the Voyageurs! Long may they reign in song, in legend, in memory.

Dick Bernard, editor



This very fine rendition of a Voyageur graces the corner of St. Clair and Western Avenues in St. Paul. It is carved from the remnants of a tree, and is well worth a look. To find it, take West 7<sup>th</sup> Street (Fort Road) to its intersection with St. Clair, turn towards the river, and go only a block. (Photo taken May 3, 2001)

## The Legend of Louis Durand, Early French Canadian Explorer

by Mike Durand, Burnsville MN

Stories abound about French Canadian Voyageurs who traveled the famous waterway routes as fur traders and explorers during the 1700s and 1800s. Louis Durand was a predecessor to many of these excursions having blazed the way beyond where many of the other Voyageurs dared, or ventured to travel. This is a story about the Legend of Louis Durand and his famous Voyage in 1696.

Louis Durand, was born November 13, 1670, to Jean and Katherine Annannontak Durand. Louis was the third and last child to this marriage. His older brother Ignace, born 1669, also became a voyageur, "coureur de bois", and made many trips up the Ottawa River. Louis Durand's father Jean Durand died when Louis was just one year old, at the age of thirty-five of unknown causes. His mother soon remarried Jacques Coutourier and together they reared Louis in addition to having six additional children, of which five survived. Louis also had an older sister named Marie, born June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1666. She married Mathurin Cadot at Montreal on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1688. Since his mother Katherine was a full-blooded Huron Indian, it was likely that Louis was at least bilingual in French and Native American languages. His mother Katherine was reported to have spoken many languages. Katherine's father was a distinguished chieftain from the Bear Clan of the Huron nation, before he was massacred by the Iroquois warriors when Katherine was just an infant.

As recorded by the map on pages 4&5, it has been documented that Louis Durand and his fellow voyageurs traveled at least into what is now known as Minnesota and Wisconsin. In 1696, this territory was known as part of "New France". Louis Durand began his life as a Voyageur at the age of 17 years when he was invited by a trading company about the first of September, 1691, to replace a voyageur, Joseph Guillet, also known as squire de Bellefeuille, who had suddenly become sick, just before a voyage was to begin. Louis agreed to "go up to the Outaouais country with the company to help transport merchandise, to trade for fur, and all that was honestly and lawfully expected of him." He was permitted to trade his gun, a blanket, six shirts and one coat for his own profit and to transport the fur belonging to himself in the returning canoe which he manned. This was Louis Durand's first known voyage. He had also participated in additional voyages before the voyage of 1696.

### The beginning of the Voyage 1696

On April 11, 1696, in Montreal, Louis Durand

(now age 29) and Joseph Moreau signed a contract with Marie-Therese Guyon, the wife of Antoine de Lamothe-Cadillac. In this contract, Durand and Moreau agreed to leave Montreal for Michillimakinac with merchandise to be delivered to commander Cadillac at Michillimakinac. They were to leave with the next canoe convoy leaving Montreal. Upon return the following September they were each to be paid a salary of one hundred pounds in silver. They were each permitted to take along one hundred pounds of merchandise to trade for their own profit.

Cadillac later encouraged them to form an association after their arrival in late April at Fort Michillimakinac and to plan a voyage to establish trading relations with the Sioux Indians who lived far to the west. Cadillac also encouraged them to join up with another Voyageur by the name of Mathieu Sauton.



In the summer of 1986, Bill Hafeman, rural Big Fork MN, the dean of birch bark canoe builders, showed members of the Hibbing chapter the secrets of making a birch bark canoe in the original style. (Shown is a small canoe. Hafeman some years earlier made a very large Montreal type, 37 feet long and 68" wide, for exhibit at the Minnesota State Fair and State Historical Society). At the time of this photo, he had been building birch bark canoes for 60 years. He passed away not long after this photo was taken. The editor of *Chez Nous* asked him a question, then, about how you could tell the difference between a Voyageur and a Chippewa canoe. In a very brief note, he said: "The Voyageur bows are higher."

Because of legal problems and wrangling with Commander Cadillac at Fort Michillimakinac, Louis Durand and his fellow Voyageurs did not depart on their voyage until sometime after July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1696. Additionally, Cadillac had seized many of their trading possessions and they had to borrow from other traders in order to make this voyage.

With re-supplied canoes of trading goods and staples the Voyageurs left to navigate the waterways on this famous voyage. When they reached the area of what we now call Green Bay WI, they entered the mouth of the Fox River. There they probably traded with the local tribes to obtain the smaller canoe's to travel the Fox, Wisconsin and Mississippi River waters.

Louis Durand had been a Voyageur for twelve years by the time he and his fellow Voyageurs made this historic trip. He was comfortable in the beauty and ways of nature. The Huron Indians had lived amongst nature and the rivers for hundreds of years. They were known to have developed the advanced agricultural methods including cultivation and gardening and also lived amongst the harvesting of natural foods and herbs. They were known as "dwellers amongst the rivers" and were known to dry and preserve fish as well as other meats. Louis was particularly noted for being an excellent Voyageur since his survival skills had withstood the test of time since he was a young boy. He enjoyed being amongst nature and being a voyageur meant freedom from the regimented life of the colony.

Louis and his fellow Voyageurs wintered in the region (probably along the Mississippi or Missouri Rivers amongst the Sioux) and returned the following year with furs and hides as well as new information which became a part of the oral and written history of the Durand family. This voyage might have had an impact on our ancestors eventually migrating to the Mississippi region.

Even though Louis Durand and his fellow Voyageurs were intimidated and had many of their original possessions taken from them by Commander Cadillac, records indicate that Louis did not back away from confronting Cadillac and pursued him in court upon his return from this historic voyage. Louis Durand also saw to it that his mother, Katherine, was cared for when he was on this voyage, by arranging credit for her at local merchants, and to be paid by him upon his return from the profits of his trading.

Louis Durand never attended school, and could either read or write, however, at a very young age he could read the great book of nature which taught a great deal of practical knowledge. The forests, lakes, and rivers held no secrets for this "coureur des bois". He knew the trees and herbs of the forest, the properties of

each, the habits of all the animals of the forests, how to hunt and trap them. He knew all the kinds of fish and how to catch them. He knew how to make a canoe from the bark of a tree and how to navigate it up and down the rivers and rapids. He knew how to put on a pair of snow shoes and overcome deep snow for twelve to fifteen miles in one day.

There was a time in his life when he thought nothing of leaving for the wildness of Labrador in Eskimo land, the shores of the Great Lakes, the Missouri River in Sioux Country or just a short voyage in neighboring forests. Very few situations found him unprepared; he was the man for unforeseen circumstances. Had he not joined America from Labrador to the Western Prairies and frequented the many Indian nations to hunt? Was he not familiar with the dialects and customs of the many tribes he met in his travels?

As I walk along the banks of the mighty Mississippi today, in Minnesota and Wisconsin, I can imagine my ancestor Louis Durand and his fellow Voyageurs navigating the beautiful river way, singing in French the famous songs which distinguished and glorified their role in the history of this great land. I can feel the presence of their spirit and know that within my own being, my spirit is filled with the will and determination of our ancestor, Louis Durand and his Voyageurs.

References:  
 Our French Ancestry in Huron County, 1631-1976 by T.W.Denomme 1976  
 The Adventures of Louis Durand, Joseph Moreau and Sieur de Antoine Laumet de La Mothe Cadillac by Roger E Durand  
 The Amerindian Princess by Paul M. Dumais, M.Ed.

**We never tire of saying that Chez Nous is your newsletter, and without your membership, and your contributions of articles and photos, etc., it cannot exist. Material for Chez Nous can be sent to Dick Bernard, 6905 Romeo Road, Woodbury MN 55125-2421 or [dick@chez-nous.net](mailto:dick@chez-nous.net).**

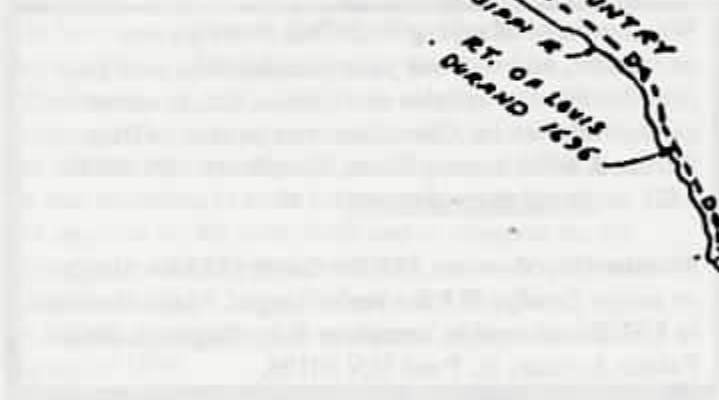
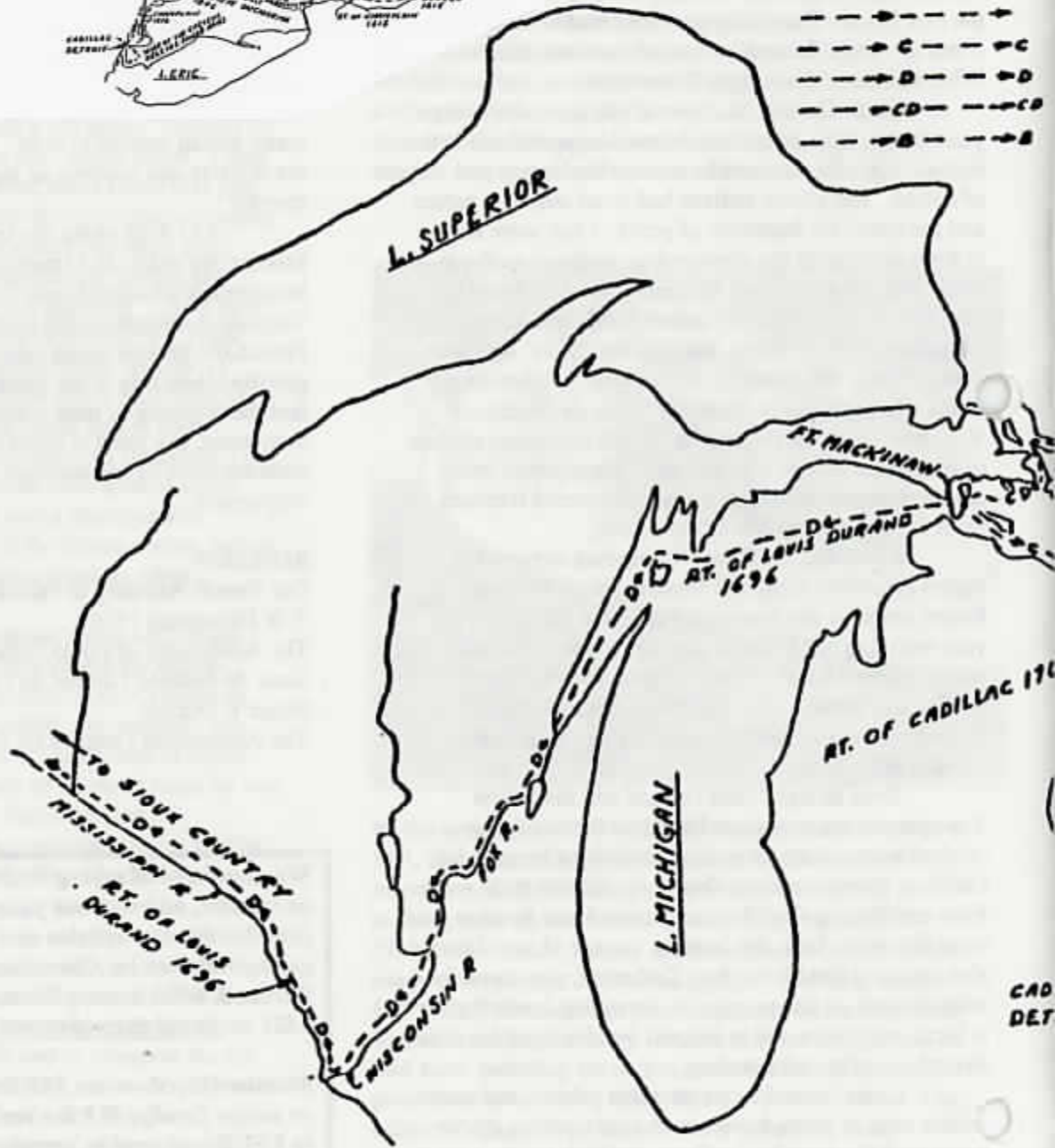
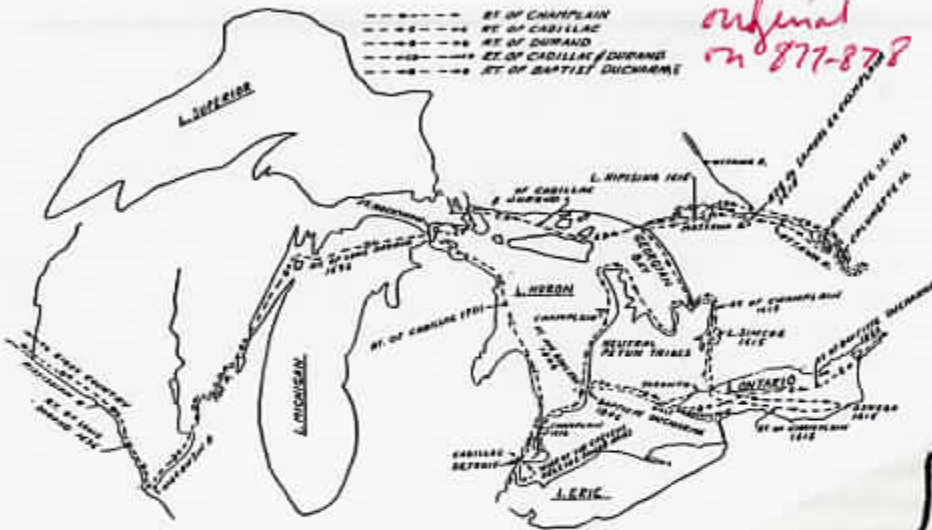
**Membership dues are \$18 for family; \$15 for single or senior family; \$12 for senior single. Make checks to LSCF and send to treasurer John England, 2002 Palace Avenue, St. Paul MN 55105.**

The Legend of Louis Durand  
Voyage of 1696

Chez Nous 4

50% from original on 877-878

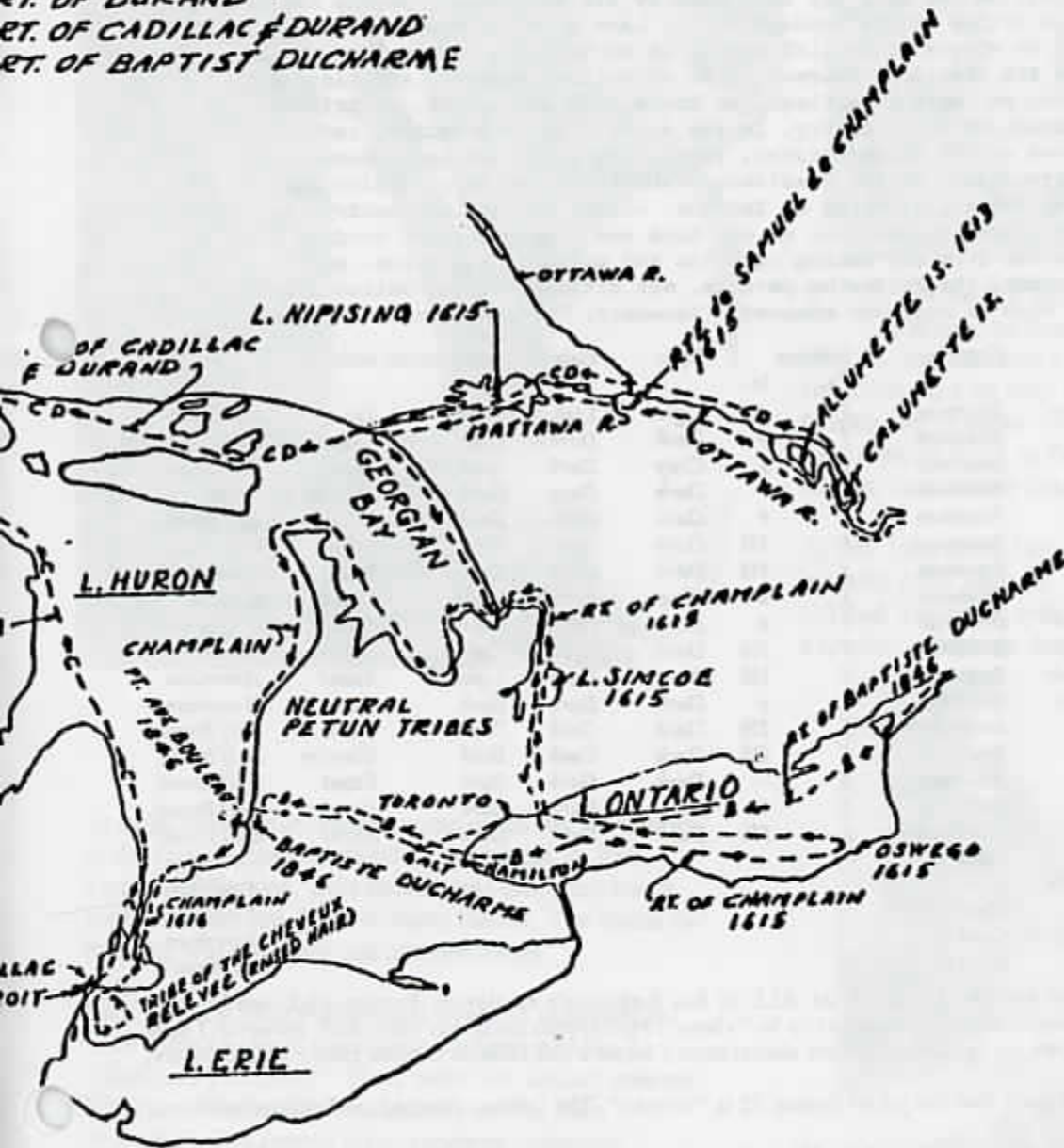
The Legend of Voyage





# Louis Durand of 1696

RT. OF CHAMPLAIN  
 RT. OF CADILLAC  
 RT. OF DURAND  
 RT. OF CADILLAC & DURAND  
 RT. OF BAPTISTE DUCHARME



Reflections on an 1830 Trader's License  
by Cal Lamoreaux, Shelbyville, MI

"After the passage by Congress of the law of 1816 prohibiting foreigners from engaging in the fur trade by giving the President the power to grant exemptions, President Madison delegated this authority to Cass, as Governor of Michigan territory and to Indian agents, of the United States at Mackinac, Green Bay, and Chicago".

Rix Robinson in a string of trading post on the Grand River, Michigan. I discovered his license, crumbling in a box in the basement of a western Michigan library. I photocopied it and am publishing it to give some insight into the nature of the fur trade in New France. (Remember that Indians were not citizens of the U.S.)

LICENCE

WHEREAS application has this day been made by Rix Robinson to permit him to trade with the Indian tribes at the Grand River of Lake Michigan and its vicinity.

Now therefor, by virtue of special powers in me vested, by the laws of the United States and by the president thereof, I do authorize, empower, and License the aforesaid Rix Robinson an American citizen, to trade with any Indian, or tribe of Indians, at Grand River and its vicinity, in any article of merchandise, not prohibited by the Laws of the United States, regulating trade and intercourse with Indian tribes or instructions of the President prohibiting the introduction or sale of ardent spirits to any Indian, or tribe of Indians, within any Indian country; until the fifteenth day of August in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty one unless sooner revoked, taking with him and using in his trade, as interpreters and boatmen, the following persons, not citizens of the United States, a descriptive list of whom is hereunto annexed. (Remember, "boatman" means voyageur.)

No.	Name	Capacity	Stature		Eyes	Hair	Complexion	Make	By Birth
			Ft.	In.					
1	Charles Bouchamp	Boatman	5	4½	Light	Light	Light	Stout	Canadian
2	Michail Jalin	Boatman	5	4	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Canadian
3	Aitkin Racitts	Boatman	5	5	Grey	Dark	Dark	Stout	Canadian
4	Francois LaBrachs	Boatman	5	9	Dark	Dark	Dark	Slender	Canadian
5	Bartilmi Gouthis	Boatman	5	4	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Canadian
6	Antoins Piccau	Boatman	5	4¼	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Canadian
7	Joseph Lacuyer	Boatman	5	5½	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Canadian
8	Francois Lapres	Boatman	5	6	Blue	Brown	Light	Stout	Canadian
9	Michael Gavndron	Boatman	5	4	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Half Breed
10	Jacob Bayer	Boatman	5	5½	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Mulattos
11	Matthew McCulpin	Boatman	5	6½	Blue	Dark	Lightish	Stout	American
12	Henry Mallincourt	Boatman	5	6	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	American
13	Pierre Cotas	Interpreter	5	2½	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Half Breed
14	Charles Martan	Boatman	5	4½	Dark	Dark	Dark	Slender	Half Breed
15	?? Bt. Brunett	Boatman	6	-	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Half Breed
16	Louis Default	Boatman	5	4	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Half Breed
17	Francois Lacroix	Boatman	5	5½	Dark	Dark	Dark	Stout	Half Breed
18	P. C. Duvimay	Clerk							American
19	Joseph Numainvills	Clerk							American
20	Samuel Lasley	Clerk							American
21	Joshua J. Boys	Clerk							American
22	Louis Carons	Woman							Half Breed"

One is tempted to assume that these are ALL of Rix Robinson's employees. Persons 18-21 are listed as American by birth and would therefore seem not to be "aliens". Half-breeds are clearly identified. However, I have to guess that the Americans are Indians, therefore aliens; since I know a full blooded Ottawa family named Lasley, cf. person 20.

It is interesting to note that the job of person 22 is "woman". The licensor assumed something that we can only guess at.

The average boatman on this list is 5 ft. 5½ inches and stout. This fits the traditional picture of a voyageur that is topheavy, muscular and short.

When studying ancient documents, one has to make many guesses and assumptions that can only be supported by studying many other contemporaneous documents. I would be delighted to hear from others who disagree with me.

Reprinted from Nouvelles Villes Jumelles, Charles Bouley, Editeur, Fevrier, 1987.



**A Grand Fete for a Grand Man...**

LaSociete's founder, John Rivard, turned 90 on May 16, and attended a celebration in his honor in Brooklyn Park on May 19. A large group of family and friends met to honor "Minnesota's Official Voyageur". John was, as usual, in fine fettle. Congratulations, John, and our best wishes for many, many more.

At left, John Rivard chatting with a guest at his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party May 19. Above, John, as Minnesota's Official Voyageur, with LaSociete member Bill Horn, at a Quebec reception, August, 1987.

At right, Sera Byrne answers some questions for visitors to the French-Canadian booth at the annual St. Paul Festival of Nations. Sera coordinated this years booth for LaSociete, and deserves many thanks. The theme for this year was costumes and accouterments.

Dick Bernard, who volunteered, made an observation from asking a single question to students on May 3, "where are you from?" There were two distinct answers: "I'm from Thailand, or Finland..."; or "I'm from Waconia". The answer given appeared to depend exclusively on whether the respondent was first or second generation American, or was several generations removed from their ancestral country of origin.



The **ANNUAL MEETING** of LaSociete C-F is Monday, June 4, 7 p.m., at St. Louis Church, St. Paul. Please make a special effort to attend this meeting, at which you will participate in a very important discussion about future plans for our organization. You will also vote on Board members for the coming year. Please bring a snack or dessert item to share.

**FESTIVAL DU ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE** is Saturday evening, June 23, at Sibley House in Mendota. This is the fifth annual celebration at Mendota. Every year has been better than the previous, all good, and every year the attendance increases since all the evenings have been very enjoyable, with music and dancing and joie de vivre. Come yourself, and ask your relatives and friends to attend as well. St. Jean-Baptiste is the patron of Quebec, and June 23, the Feast Day, is a national holiday in Quebec.

**VIRGINIA SANDERSON**, chair of the Language Division at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, writes seeking a candidate who would be interested in teaching part-time at the college, including Beginning French, Intermediate French, and a French Culture course - eight semester credits in the fall and eleven in the spring. "Language classes meet in the language lab one day a week for laboratory classroom instruction. Most of the classes are held in the morning. Minimum qualification is a Master's degree in French or 23 quarter credits in French which would apply to the major. The ideal candidate will be comfortable teaching in a computerized language lab setting, will have near native proficiency, and possess dynamic teaching skills. Anyone interested should send a letter of application along with a resume detailing qualifications, academic background, and teaching experience to: Kelly Befus, Dean of Educational Services, Anoka-Ramsey Community College, 11200 Mississippi Blvd NW, Coon Rapids MN 55433 (763) 422-3330. Virginia, who is retiring after 13 years at the college, says "I have felt privileged to be at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. With 4500 students, a beautiful campus on the bank of the Mississippi River, and an outstanding faculty, it is an ideal work environment for someone who is passionate about teaching French. She can be reached at 763-422-3325.

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# Chez Nous

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

Juillet-Août 2001

Elway Station PO Box 16583 St. Paul 55116-0583

Vol. 23, No. 4, Issue 126

## A SUMMER TRIP TO WINNIPEG

By Dick Bernard

It is impossible to travel to Winnipeg from the Twin Cities without passing through, mostly without knowing it, a very long history of French-Canadian presence. We revisited my history in the Valley of the Red on the weekend of July 15, 2001.

For me, the family history hits home always at the Alexander Henry Trading Post rest stop on Interstate 29, generally east of Grafton ND, and near the confluence of the Park and Red Rivers. It was at that location, family legend has it, that my grandmother Josephine (Collette) Bernard was born August 9, 1881, about three years after her entire family had migrated from northeast Minneapolis and Our Lady of Lourdes parish to virgin farmland in country just being extensively settled by the white man.

At the time of Josephine's birth, her father Denys-Octave Collette, supposedly owned a hotel at the location, then called St. Andrews, now long defunct.

The pace of settlement increased rapidly with the completion of the Minneapolis-Winnipeg railway in 1878. It is likely that most of the new farm families came by train to the closest Minnesota point east of the area, then pushed west on foot, crossing the sluggish Red River, perhaps by ferry, at some point.

### The Metis Cemetery at Pembina

But settlement had begun much earlier. There were fur trade posts to the north, near present day Pembina, North Dakota, by the 1790's. And by 1818, Father Severe Dumoulin had established a Catholic mission at Pembina. The little colony had prominence in the role of providing early settlers to what is now Minneapolis-St. Paul. Minnesotans know of the legend of Jolly Joe Rollette of Pembina, a key character in the establishment of St. Paul as the state capitol.

In Pembina, as the course of nature... and the church... go, through it all there were baptisms, marriages and deaths at the little Parish.

A cemetery was established for the local church at a location just 100 yards east of Interstate 29, and less



The reestablished Metis cemetery near Pembina, North Dakota, looking east, July, 2001. (The present day community of Pembina is a short distance southeast, just off the photo.)

than a half-mile from the present day border with Canada. For years a placard had marked the site. It was not until May 26, 2001, that the gravesites of the Metis buried there were again marked with crosses. (See the Minneapolis Star-Tribune May 27, 2001, for details.)

For those with a computer, an interesting 1999 description of the history of the cemetery, and various attempts to change its use and memories can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Bluffs/1797>. It gives not only some history, but some insights into the kinds of conflicts that come up in the course of protecting sites such as this.

The unsigned 1999 website article, not updated since 1999, says this: "Father Severe Dumoulin established a Catholic mission at Pembina in 1818; by 1823, when the community was moved north to St. Francois-Xavier, he had recorded 49 burials. The names of these people were burned in a fire at St. Boniface Cathedral in 1860. There is a list that has been prepared by volunteers for Assumption Catholic Church, Pembina, which lists the names of the people buried from 1849, when Father Belcourt was there, to 1892, when the last burial is recorded. There are 165 names on this list; the only one we know of that was moved was Joe Rolette Sr. He was moved to the new non-denominational cemetery which is west of the town of Pembina.

There were two villages centred in Pembina in the 1790's. These fur trade posts were established around the forks of the Pembina and the Red rivers. This area was prone to flooding; there were severe floods in 1826, 1851 and 1860. Father Dumoulin established his mission on a ridge north of the Forks about half a mile south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel... this ridge which runs beside a coulee is a high spot in the area and less prone to flooding. Eye-witnesses who lived nearby in the 1920s and 1930s describe the site as a "mound".

In 1893, after the Catholic Church stopped burying people there, the State Legislature of North Dakota passed an appropriation of \$500 "to purchase and maintain the site." Unfortunately they never set aside the money and the cemetery was virtually abandoned. A farmer named Frank Morris obtained the land from the original owner, Edward Lemon, and neighbors claimed that Lemon respected the cemetery by farming around it. By the 1920s markers, which were probably wooden crosses, had deteriorated and fallen down. Nevertheless, this site of the oldest Christian burial ground in North Dakota was known and respected. At some point in the 1920s or 1930s (accounts differ), Frank Morris decided to plant a crop on the site. He subsequently farmed over

the mound or ridge and his relatives continued to farm over it. In the 1930's, the local Catholic Priest, Father Belleau, recorded that a local Metis, Mr. Francois-Xavier Gosselin estimated that the mission was five acres and the cemetery was ten acres.

In the 1950's, James Reardon, biographer of Father Belcourt, visited the site and reported the location. He said that Frank Morris had started cultivating it in the 1920's, uncovering squared timbers which were part of the mission buildings. In the 1960's, local heritage boosters, Mayor Albert Christopher and his wife Henrietta, "Pat", tried to lobby the Morris family to stop farming over the graves. They were unsuccessful. In 1963, they lobbied the State Historical Society to put up the plaque [which still exists along I-29] but were unsuccessful at getting a cross and a fence. In 1968, they organized a group of volunteers, to create a list of the names of people buried in the cemetery from the parish registers; they had a plaque made with the names from this list, but the Morris family would not permit them to have it put up at the site. It can now be seen in the churchyard in the town. About 90% of the names are French Metis. In the late 1980's, Dr. Jacqueline Peterson, from the University of Minnesota, approached the State Historical Society to have the site protected. She registered it with the State Health Department, but unfortunately cited the wrong section. She subsequently moved and the State Historical Society did not take any action although they appeared to know that the wrong location had been registered to protect the site from farming. There [was a] meet[ing] with Fern Swenson, archaeologist, in October 1992. She claimed that she did not have permission from the landowner to go on the land to do a site survey and they she did not know the exact location of the site. She claimed the State Historical Society had no information on the history of the site. In October 1993, there was a call made to the owner, Mrs. Emma Moris, and asked for a meeting. Mrs. Moris refused claiming that all the graves had been moved. She then threatened to call her lawyer. She claimed she had never received a phone call from the state archaeologist asking for permission to do a site survey.

In the fall of 1993, there was a person [who] filed a complaint with the Pembina County States Attorney because it is illegal in North Dakota to farm over a cemetery. She claimed she could do nothing because it was an abandoned cemetery. When no action was taken, there was a call to the Attorney General in Bismarck. Within a week, the States Attorney notified

him that the archaeologist had permission to do a site survey. This was not done until a year later, in June 1995. At that time, finding two small pieces of human bone on the surface, the archaeologist declared that she had found the cemetery and in 1996, a year later, set aside two and a half acres, guessing at the size and location of the site. There has been lobbying for geophysical testing to find the graves. We felt that the graves should be located before the boundaries were set.

In September, 1997, the State Historical Society gave a grant to the Pembina County Commissioners to hire High Plains Consortium of Bismarck to use underground radar to find the graves. In April, 1998, their report suggested a larger site than what was set aside: the results identified 480-600 anomalies in the soil which the geologist claimed were potential grave sites. There have been 215 graves identified from historical records and the state archaeologist had told HPC to look for about 100 graves. These testing results were larger than expected and state officials denied them, suggesting they were "gopher holes or freeze thaw cracks" after digging four small test pits in the spring of 1998. There was a challenge to these denials from June to October 1998 when we organized a public meeting in Pembina. The state archaeologist Fern Swenson did not have the courtesy to attend, although she made her report public a week later. She recommended increasing the size of the site to 3.7 acres although she continued to deny the validity of the results of the underground radar testing. She had called in another firm to use another technique and claimed the results were "inconclusive". Dr. Ray Butler, the geologist from HPC, attended a meeting and explained his techniques. He offered to find the rest of the graves for less than \$1000 and estimated the site to be around five acres. In November, the Pembina County Commissioners invited three Pembina Metis descendants to a meeting and heard their views; they subsequently voted to set aside 3.7 acres. However, nothing has happened since December [1998?] when the descendants were told they could expect a resolution. It appears that the Moris family have refused to give up the 3.7 acres.

In January, 1999, Samuel Wegner, Superintendent of the State Historical Society, promised to organize a public meeting in Pembina in April or May to discuss the issue, however, we have not heard anything since January.

#### **The St. Boniface Cathedral**

The Pembina parish began as part of the diocese of St. Boniface, which at least unofficially pre-dated the beginning of the Diocese of St. Paul in 1848.

There is a great deal to be said about St. Boniface and its Catholic and French-Canadian heritage. For this article only a few words and a photo will

suffice.

The first church on the site of the present Cathedral of St. Boniface, was built November 1, 1818, by Father Joseph-Norbert Provencher. The site is on the magnificent Red River of the North, directly east of, and just across the river from, present day downtown Winnipeg. Since the early 1970s, the formerly primarily French speaking municipality of St. Boniface has been a part of greater Winnipeg, a city whose united municipalities comprise about 60% of the total 1.2 million population of the province of Manitoba.

The grave of Metis patriot Louis Riel, (1843-1885), has a very prominent monument in the churchyard of the Cathedral (photo of monument on the following page.) Like so many famous patriots, Riel died in disgrace, but later made a huge and positive mark on history in western Canada, and today is memorialized also with a great statue at the Provincial capitol.

Visitors to the current Cathedral will note that



The present day St. Boniface Cathedral, July, 2001. Cathy Bernard in foreground.



the present church is built inside the walls of the formerly much more massive church, which was destroyed by fire in 1968. The current sanctuary is perhaps half the size of the original. The Mass is completely in French. When we were there, for Sunday Mass in mid-July, the congregation was relatively senior, and relatively sparse in numbers - perhaps a sign of the times - fewer francophones, fewer practicing Catholics.

The present Cathedral is the most recent of five churches which have stood on the beautiful location. The first was the log chapel built by Father Provencher in 1818; the second was erected by Bishop Provencher in 1832. (This was the Cathedral at the time of Father Joseph Goiffon, a French priest in the Diocese of St. Paul beginning in 1857, whose adventures while assigned to Pembina, have been reported in earlier issues of *Chez Nous*).

A third Cathedral was built in 1862; followed by the magnificent structure, constructed in 1906, which was consumed by fire in 1968. A model of the fourth Cathedral is on display in the sanctuary of the present day Cathedral (photo of model below. At left, Louis Riel grave monument on the church grounds.).





# Chez Nous

The newsletter of

La Société

Canadienne Française du Minnesota

Septembre-Octobre 2001

Elway Station PO Box 16583 St Paul 55116-0583

Vol. 23, No. 5, Issue 127



**The World Trade Center  
New York, New York  
May all the victims of all the tragic events  
of September 11, 2001  
know that we will never forget.  
May they rest in peace.**

**A Memory...offered by Dick Bernard**

The photos at left were taken by myself at the end of June, 1972.

I was on my first, and so far only, visit to New York City when I took these photos. A short while before seeing WTC, we had visited the United Nations building. I took the second photo in route by ferry to the Statue of Liberty.

I had no idea that I was photographing history. At the time of these photos, the north tower of WTC had just been completed; the south tower was within months of completion. One of the towers opened in 1972; the second was dedicated early in 1973.

Of course these vibrant places and several thousand of those who visited and worked there, are now but a memory.

May their memory remind us of the temporary and unpredictable nature of life; of the need to live our lives as well as we can while we can. And may they remind us also of the need to strive for peace and justice in this world of which our country and its people are but a small part.

Postscript: The image of WTC collapsing will likely endure in our national memory, much like the battleship Arizona at Pearl Harbor, 60 years ago, December 7, 1941. My Dad's brother, Uncle Frank, went down with the Arizona, so each time the tape is replayed, I witness his death. May he rest in Peace, and may we work for Peace, always.

*Dick Bernard.*



**A Spectators View of a Vibrant Life, still lived...**

By Dick Bernard, Editor, Chez Nous

**John Rivard****The Official Voyageur of Minnesota**

I meandered into John Rivard's circle quite by accident: a neighbor - Norwegian at that - invited me to an event at the Jeanne d'Arc Auditorium at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul MN, sponsored by a group I'd never heard of called La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota (LSCF). It was the fall of 1981.

The event turned out to be spectacular, featuring performers from Quebec. By that point in my life, at age 41, I had finally realized I had French-Canadian ancestry, and was just beginning my "voyage" to assemble my roots.

At that point, I had not yet heard of John Rivard, founder of LSCF, but it wouldn't take long. That night twenty years ago I decided to join the organization, and I've been with it ever since.

John Rivard, a native of Somerset, Wisconsin - a community that today would be considered a distant suburb of Minneapolis St. Paul - has for years been proud of his status as the "Official Voyageur of Minnesota". Now well into his 91<sup>st</sup> year, John still has the traits that endeared him to French-Canadians and others over the many years he has carried the torch for his culture: energy, wit, and above all a passionate love of his culture.

Perhaps my first real memory of John Rivard was in June, 1982, when I took my father to a picnic of La Societe in suburban St. Paul. Dad was here to visit, and looking forward to his first trip to the land of his roots, Quebec. But before embarking on our voyage, we went to a marvelous picnic of what seemed to be hundreds of people of all ages, all organized by John Rivard. There was a gigantic kettle of genuine soupe aux pois (which Dad pronounced was the real thing!); a pig roasting on a spit; some spirited singing, in French, by a group of members. Dad, 74 then, felt like he'd died and gone to heaven! At that time, according to my calculations, John was already over 70, older than I am, today, and full of joie de vivre.

I started to get to know John, but only a little and from a distance. I was still a novice in my culture, and I didn't share the French language. But each time I went to an event, I saw John, radiating energy and enthusiasm.

Not long after my active membership began I moved to Minnesota's Iron Range, 200 miles away from the Twin Cities. By this time, I was hooked on LaSociete and endeavored to gather local French-Canadians together in that part of Minnesota.



John Rivard (center) regaled his guests with stories at his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday fete, May, 2001.

At one point in the mid-1980s, John accepted my invitation and made the long drive up north to do a program for our fledgling group. He stayed over night with me in Hibbing MN, and I remember a delightful conversation about things French-Canadian, and about life in general. He gave, I received.

He did his program on the Voyageur for us - a program he marketed successfully to schools. He was an immensely entertaining Voyageur. Along the way he developed other routines: I once saw him do a fascinating program on the history of the Middle East. I think of that program often, these days. He was a born entertainer, as well as educator.

Also in the mid-1980's he had a direct hand in organizing a phenomenal conference in Minneapolis: Le Heritage Tranquille. It attracted several hundred participants from all over, and for one Saturday at least, the quiet heritage was not so quiet on the local scene.

After eight years away, I came back home. By now, 1992, John was not quite as active, but there was still his indelible imprint on our club. Chez Nous, the newsletter he founded back in 1980, has now been printed 127 times over the years. Sure, it's a modest publication, but it still carries forward the messages he hoped would be carried: stories about our ancestors, and about French-Canadian activities.

I most recently saw John at his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday fete in early May, 2001. He's no longer running foot races, but watching him work the crowd at his fete was an absolute delight. He may have been 20 years older than when I first met him, but still the same John that I remember!

What a gift you've been to us. Merci, John Rivard.



Fete de la St. Jean-Baptiste  
Sibley House Historic Site  
Mendota, Minnesota

Photos at left, from top to bottom:  
1997 fete, with Jane Peck;  
Les Fils du Voyageurs from Ashland  
WI, 2001 fete;  
part of the crowd at 2001 fete.



On June 23, 1997, and each  
subsequent June 23, the Minnesota  
Historical Society Sibley House site  
in Historic Mendota, has hosted a  
celebration of the eve of the Feast of  
St. Jean-Baptiste, French Canada's  
patron.

The event has been under the capable  
and enthusiastic direction of Lisa  
Krahn.

From very modest beginnings in 1997  
- there were perhaps 15 people in  
attendance - the event has now grown  
to the extent that several hundred  
converged on the historic and very  
attractive site in 2001.

We thank Lisa Krahn and the  
Minnesota Historical Society, and all  
who help make this new Twin Cities  
tradition possible.

Mark June 23, 2002, in your calendar  
now... and plan to attend.



**Notes to Members:**

•You may have noted a delay in **Chez Nous**. The editor apologizes for temporarily "running out of gas". Such can happen after 16 years of editing a publication.

•We again express our profuse thanks to the **Minnesota Humanities Commission** for a substantial grant in 2000-2001; we believe the grant will be renewed in 2001-2002. The grant requires equal or greater effort by the organization, so your participation through at minimum your membership is essential. Please renew.

•The La Societe Board met on October 9. President Simone Germain announces the following programs: **Our annual Christmas potluck and party is Saturday, December 1, at St. Louis Church Hall, St. Paul, beginning at 6 p.m. Come for 5 p.m. Mass, and join us for a great evening; Mardi Gras get-together will be Saturday, February 9, also at St. Louis Church hall. The theme for St. Paul's Festival of Nations (April 25-28) is "Gatherings". La Societe C-F will again be involved. We ask your assistance as a volunteer.**

•As always, your contributions to **Chez Nous** are solicited. We especially look for stories remembering Christmas past. Please submit by mid-November to editor Dick Bernard, 6905 Romeo Road, Woodbury 55125-2421 or [dick@chez-nous.net](mailto:dick@chez-nous.net). We also wish to announce that we are planning to contribute a Minnesota page to the well known Franco-American paper, *Le Forum*, published by the University of Maine. We have already begun collaboration with this major newsletter. Stay tuned for more announcements.

•LaSociete C-F Board 2001-2002: Simone Germain, president, 952-285-6533 [sbgermain@yahoo.com](mailto:sbgermain@yahoo.com); Pat Romanov, vice-president 952-432-6483 [patromanov@aol.com](mailto:patromanov@aol.com); Renee Juair, secretary, 651-225-0937 [reneej.lce@juno.com](mailto:reneej.lce@juno.com); John England, treasurer, 651-699-5178; Sera Byrne, 651-436-1678 [seraphineb@aol.com](mailto:seraphineb@aol.com); Dick Bernard 651-730-4849 [dick@chez-nous.net](mailto:dick@chez-nous.net)

Thank you for your past and continuing support. We wish you Peace, always.



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# Chez Nous

The newsletter of

La Société

Canadienne Française du Minnesota

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Novembre-Décembre 2001 Elway Station PO Box 16583 St. Paul 55116-0583 Vol. 23, No. 6, Issue 128

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*To the members of La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota*  
January 2, 2002

The board of LSCF is using this year as a time of reconstitution. We are looking at new ideas and thoughts to keep LSCF active and present in Minnesota and the Midwest. As time moves on, changes will occur.

Dick Bernard, editor of *Chez Nous*, has informed me of his decision to step down as editor for the year 2002. He has put much personal time, effort, and thought into our newsletter. I know many have enjoyed the numerous articles we have read through the years. We will miss *Chez Nous*. Merci beaucoup, Dick, for all your hard work.

At the same time, I am happy to inform you that we have a replacement paper. It is *Le Forum*, out of the University of Maine. Dick Bernard will act as liaison with the editor of the paper. It is a long-published newspaper with a circulation of about 5000, and a full-time production staff. It has articles in both French and English. There are plans in place to have a Minnesota page each issue (six times per year, as *Chez Nous*.) You will receive your first issue of *Le Forum*, probably in late February.

I am also pleased to let you know that although *Le Forum* is a much larger newspaper than *Chez Nous*, member dues will remain the same for 2002. However, we will be paying \$12 per member for *Le Forum*, which is reduced from their regular subscription cost. *Chez Nous* cost about \$7 per member. Therefore we would appreciate any voluntary donations to help with the extra costs incurred with this larger newspaper. You may send these donations, made to LSCF, to John England, treasurer, at 2002 Palace Avenue, St. Paul MN 55105.

Thank-you for your understanding. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the board or me.

Sincerely,  
Simone Germain  
President, La Societe Canadienne-Francaise  
(952) 285-6533 sbgermain@yahoo.com

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# Spinning Stars: A Franco American Christmas Story

Written by *Cassandra Dwyer, Mont Vernon NH* & Illustrated by *Renée Bouchard*

Reprinted with permission of the author. Originally appeared in *Le Forum, Université du Maine*, Septembre, 2001.

Dang Dong. Dang Dong. The familiar noise of the Amoskeag bell makes me jump and smile and run all at once. Work at the mill is over for the day and the people fill the streets. I watch from the window where the curtains are scratchy against my face. The fabric comes from the mill, I like to think my family helped to make the scratchy fabric. Papa, Yvette and Rose are slow, they never come running down the street when the bell rings. The children come first, running running running away from the mill. Then the grown ups walk out of the mill yard and down the little street where we live. When I ask them why they are so slow Papa says he's too old to run. My sisters say they're legs are tired from work. I think if I worked, if I made money, my legs would be too happy to get tired!

Papa, Yvette and Rose come into the house and it is time for dinner. We have a long table of shiny wood with benches down the sides for everyone to sit. There is one chair on the end where Papa sits. Mama always

sits by the stove and and it doesn't matter where everyone else sits. We always seem to have extra people around for dinner and there is always room. Tonight my Mémère and my cousin who lives two streets over came for dinner. Mama says, "Oh! What's one or two more! Mange mange!" That means eat, eat! I think Mama really likes to cook. Ma made pâté chinois it sits in a huge glass bowl steaming with potatoes, corn and beef but before we eat we always say a prayer. Tonight Rose starts the prayer and then we all join in. We say the Hail Mary. "Je vous salue Marie pleine de grâce. . ."

Then we pass the pâté chinois around the table and everyone talks about their day. The talking gets loud and soft and then very loud. We speak French at home but now that we live in New Hampshire we practice English too. Pa says he had trouble with the overseer at work. Yvette says that he isn't nice to the girls in her department. They sigh a lot. Pa gets very quiet and once I saw him smiling sadly at me. I look around the table at my four sisters and five brothers. I miss brother Camille. He is studying to be a priest far away. Yvette and Rose are the oldest girls and they both work at the Amoskeag mill and earn money. Papa always says he doesn't know what he'd do without his spinning stars. I like that name, spinning stars, I want to be one of his stars too. Later I crawl into bed with Yvette and Rose and Ma comes in to say good night. She leans over and

**Translations:** In order as they appear within the story  
**Mémère:** Grandmother

**Pâté chinois:** Chinese pie, also known as Shepherd's pie, baked hamburger, corn and mashed potatoes

**Je vous salue Marie pleine du grâce:** Hail Mary full of grace. . .

**Bonsoir:** Good night

**Mon petite chou:** This is a common Franco endearment meaning my little cabbage

**Les enfants:** The children

**Les matants:** The aunts

**Les mononcles:** The uncles

**Chanson à réponse:** A call and response song between the lead singer and audience; sometimes includes rounds

**La patience des anges:** The patience of angels

**Vite:** Hurry!

**Les cousins:** The cousins

**Les bonhommes de neige:** Snowmen

**Tourtières:** Meat pies

**Petites soeurs:** A type of rolled cookie filled with either jelly, sugar, raisins or nuts. Usually made from left over pie dough.

**Crèche:** A manger

kisses each of us saying "bonsoir mon petite chou."

Then she sits on the edge of the bed next to me.

"Cecile," she says taking my hands in hers, "I think it would be a good idea if you accompanied Yvette to work. We need someone in the family to learn how to spin. Winter is here and if Yvette or Rose fall sick..." She sighs and smiles at my sisters who are already beginning to doze into sleep. "Well," she begins again, "if they should tire and get a cold we will need someone to fill in at the mill so that we can keep earning money. I would go but..." Ma gestures to her round belly, she is going to have another baby. I am excited to be asked, I will be a spinning star! Mama glances at me, her eyes sparkling, "Cecile I still want you to be a nun. This is temporary. Bonsoir." Mom shuts the door leaving me in warm darkness.

Yvette and Rose are snoring softly and wiggle under the covers thinking about how I will work with them. Sometimes they talk about dancing in the spinning room. I can't imagine dancing at work, it sounds like fun to me. At breakfast I told Yvette that soon I would be going to work with her, she got grumpy!

Putting down her spoon she said, "Cecile you should make yourself into a proper nun. Give your thanks to God. Go to school like brother Camille, don't work in the mill. It is dirty and you might get the cough." I know some people get the cough and they cough and cough till they bleed. The coughing comes from the dirt in the mill but I'd rather cough than go to school. I am so excited to miss school and learn how to spin!

The day to go to the mill is the Wednesday before Christmas. When I come home after the six to six shift with Yvette I am tired. Ma and Pa look at me. I think they are sad. It was not as fun I thought it would

#### Background Information about the setting of this story:

*Spinning Stars* is set in Manchester NH in 1920.

The characters live in the tenement housing of the Amoskeag mill, one of the countries largest textile factory of the time. Employee's had little to no say about their working conditions or pay. Generally employee's of the mill worked twelve-hour days Monday through Friday and a half day on Saturday. The air was filled with fibers that led to many lung problems. Many of the workers in these mills were women and children of Canadian descent. Between 1851-1900 it is estimated that 500,000 French Canadians emigrated to the US in search of employment. With them they brought their strong family values, music, foods and perhaps most importantly they brought their language.



be. The mill is big but the rooms are full with people, moving crazy looms and noise! The noise was awful. Yvette tried to yell into my ear to tell me how to set the cards or tie special knots but I could not hear anything but the droning powerful noise of all of those moving looms. I thought my ears were going to burst. And it only seemed to get louder. I was not able to help Yvette very much as she kept rushing between three looms and shouting words I could not hear. Next time will be better and next time I will learn to do it myself. I want to make money too, I want to help my family.

That night Ma made baked beans and brown bread for supper and they tasted so good! I was very hungry after being on my feet all day. After dinner we all helped washing the dishes at the dark sink. We did a lot of singing too. After the dishes Yvette and I play cards, it felt good to sit. Rose works on her needle point picture. She says she'll teach me when I'm older. Tonight I do not want to think about yarn or cloth or any type of weaving. Her picture has a bird on it with a wide wide mouth and says "Pa's the Boss as Everyone Knows but What Ma Says Always Goes." It is almost done and will be Christmas present for my Aunt Louise. I am so excited for Christmas I feel it will never arrive!

Thursday in school my teacher did not ask where I was. I think my parents told her. I did very well in my English lesson and recited an entire poem. I do not think that I will miss going to school when I begin working at the mill. That night Papa tried to teach me to

play chess but I got confused by all the pieces. Les enfants always want to play too and sometimes they mess up the game. I do not like having to watch les enfants. They are very little and not very smart.

Saturdays are the best and the Saturday before Christmas was no exception. The mill bell rings early in the day and everyone came home smiling! My family likes to celebrate. Les matants and mononcles come over with all my cousins. My Mémère comes over too, she lives with my mon Oncle Gary and ma Tante Louise. We play play play all afternoon! The grown ups played Pinochle while the kids played rummy then outside in



the snow. Yvette says, next year when I turn twelve she'll teach me Pinochle. She says it's difficult to hold all the cards with small hands. While we are outside the kids from the other houses come out to play too and together we line the street with small snowmen. I hope they last until Christmas morning. Our little tenement houses look magical with all the marching white men lining the street.

My aunts and uncles stayed late into the night and we sing and sing and sing until there is too much laughter in our throats to sing anymore. I like too much laughter. My brother René likes laughter too much, he pees his pants and Ma makes me change him. Mama says he'll be potty trained soon. She also tells me not to complain, "Cecile, you need la patience des anges!" When Rene is clean and wiping his teary eyes we march back downstairs and join in the chanson à réponse. I try to be good but it is boring to take care of les enfants.

I feel like always have to watch them. I can't wait until they grow up. Ma and Pa say when Alice and Jeanne and René grow up we will all take a trip to Canada for a visit! They say we will ride the train! Mama and Papa say that in Canada everyone speaks French all the time. I think I would like Canada but I do not want to go to school in Canada.

I want to dance in the mills and work hard too

and make money. Maybe one of les enfants will be a nun, Alice and Jeanne are just little now but maybe they'll want to go to Canada far away for school. Then they will take the train.

They can come home for Christmas time like Camille! Camille will be home in two days and I can not wait! Mama is up late at night at her sewing machine getting ready for Christmas. We always have new clothes. The day before Christmas I fall asleep to the whirring of her machine. When I awake my sisters are talking quickly and they are so excited. "Vite Vite Cecile!" They say prodding me from under the blankets. "Time for Mass!" Then Mama comes in wearing her dress she finished last night, it is heavy blue and very pretty. Yvette, Rose and I wiggle into our new cotton dresses with many ruffles and help each other adjust the bows and tie hair ribbons. Then we all stand in the hall pulling on scarves, hats, mittens, sweaters and coats. Buried under layers we spill out of our little house and onto the street. It is time for Christmas mass, it is always the best of the year. We go to Sainte-Marie's Church. After we peel off all of our winter clothes we are lovely!

The walls of the church are so beautiful and the ceiling dips and curves. Mama says that an artist from Canada helped make our church so beautiful. It is wonderful to wear new clothes that Mama made but at church the priest talks and talks in fast Latin which I do not understand. Only the sermon is in French so that is the best part. Mama asked me to keep les enfants quiet but they get bored too!

After church we have the really fun part. Camille is home by the time we return and there is much hugging and kissing and so many questions. Camille told me he liked the petite les bonhommes de neige along the street. Les matantes, mononcles, cousins and Mémère come over too and all my cousins sing sing sing. Mon oncle plays the fiddle and ma tante Louise yodels. They all bring food until it piles everywhere and we keep eating and eating and no ones says to stop. There are tourtières, petites soeurs, ribbon candies, peanuts, and chocolate. My favorite food at Christmas is tourtières. They fill the house with the rich smell of pork.

While we listen to ma tantes sing and eat sweets Camille comes to sit next to me. I ask him if people really speak French all the time in Canada and he says where he lives they do. I think that sounds lovely. Then he tells me, "Cecile you should come to Trois Riverare and study to be a nun. Ma and Pa say they can pay for it. I am scared to see you in that awful mill with overseers money and bells running your life." I tell Camille that I want to work and make money and help



the family. I tell him not to worry, its Christmas. Quietly I think of the noise and heat of the mill. Quietly I think I may not like it there after all. I am glad when Mémère tells us to come into the kitchen because the tourtières are ready! Everyone eats a slice as soon as they are ready. There is not enough room at the table or in the parlor so I sit on the stairs with my cousins. We all eat a lot before opening presents. I love sitting on the stairs because I can see all the presents and the tree.

The tree is covered with ornaments my family made. The cousins like to give ornaments to everyone as presents, we make a lot of them. There are pasta angels, paper stars and tiny pictures of Jesus in a crèche. Everyone who comes brings a present for everyone else and that makes a lot of presents! The presents flood from beneath the tree and spill everywhere. It takes hours to open them all because we all take turns. Ma tante Louise knit sweaters and socks that are very colorful. Mama surprised everyone by making tiny toy animals for les enfants. They are beautiful. Mon oncle Gary made tiny wooden games. All the presents were wonderful! This year I baked for everyone. I made tiny cakes, well Rose helped too. Mémère said they were the best cakes she had ever tasted. That made me smile. Already my cheeks feel stretched and funny from smiling so much. In the middle of the presents, the singing and the laughter we all paused, the six o'clock bells are rung, dang dong dang dong. We are reminded that soon work will fill the days, we are reminded that this wealth of presents and food was hard earned and the work is not over.

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Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments, your feedback is very welcome!  
 I can be reached at [cassiestarr@yahoo.com](mailto:cassiestarr@yahoo.com)

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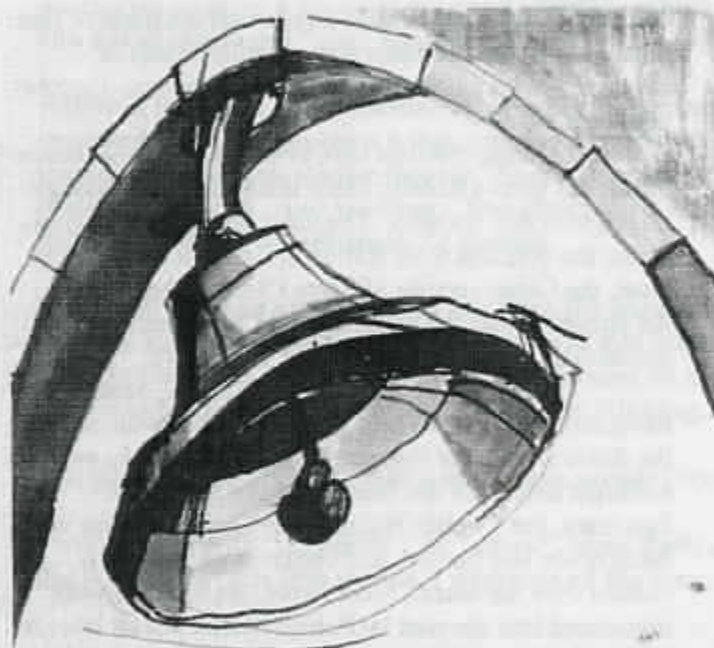
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**Rene Juairé**, faithful Board member and very active member of LaSociete, has notified the Board that she needs to resign for personal reasons. Her active presence will be missed. Thank you Rene. Rene can be reached at 261 E University Ave #1105 St Paul 55101 651-225-0937 [reneej.lce@juno.com](mailto:reneej.lce@juno.com).



## Putting up the Christmas lights, Louisiana-style

By Mary Ann Sternberg

Note from the editor: This article most interesting article comes from Anna Himel of Houma LA, and is from a Louisiana magazine. Unfortunately we are unable to determine either the magazine or its date, though it appears the publication appeared in 1990. For those with access to the internet, you can learn more at <http://www.festivalofthebonfires.org>.

As dusk falls on Christmas Eve, Nolan Oubre gives the signal to light the string of wooden pyres that seems to stretch to infinity along the spine of the Mississippi River levee. Over his car's PA system, he speaks the long-anticipated words: "It is now 7 p.m.; you may light your bonfires." It is ironic that the leathery, walrus-mustached Oubre would be among those charged with the setting of fires, causing a hundred curtains of purple and orange flame to rise in to the black velvet night, crackling and popping and sparking showers of gold along the green flank of the man-made ridge. Ordinarily - as chief of the volunteer fire department in Gramercy, Louisiana (pop. Maybe 3,500) - he is in charge of putting them out.

But the fire chief's role reversal is symptomatic of the fever that pervades rural St. James Parish each December. Between Halloween and Christmas, a host of locals devote thousands of hours to the construction of intricate log masterpieces. Most are 25-foot-high, tightly wrought pyramids. Some, like those of industrial maintenance worker Ronald St. Pierre, are detailed reproductions of familiar local subjects, such as a log cabin, an oil rig with derrick, a two-story plantation house with double-curved stairway, or a turn-of-the-century locomotive complete with cowcatcher and smokestack. A few whimsical constructions - PeeWee's Playhouse or the roughly cut digits of a graduation year - round out the field. But at the fire chief's signal, all of the structures - regardless of artistry or size - are uniformly torched.

Christmas Eve is the only time of year when River Road, once the only highway between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, becomes a curvy, two-lane gridlock from the Mt. Airy town line west to Convent. Nightfall brings thousands of pedestrians, who swarm back and forth among the cars inching along to get a close-up view of the blazing sentinels. The light radiating from within the geometric skeletons makes them look eerily akin to the chemical plants and refineries that dominate the flat landscape.



From the river waft the rollicking soprano notes of calliopes on paddle wheelers up from New Orleans, the hoarse bass of freighter horns and the insistent buzzing of small craft. The bounce of swamp pop and *chank-a-chank* Cajun music mixes with the blaze of jam boxes, car horns and firecrackers, while smells of kerosene, sweet smoke, burned powder, beer and gumbo permeate the air.

Lighting bonfires on Christmas Eve in St. James Parish has been a holiday ritual since the 1880s, though its origin is still debated. The most popular explanation is that the bonfires were started to light the way for Pap Noel, the Cajun version of Santa Claus, as he paddled his pirogue to deliver gifts to good Cajun children - but traditionally Papa arrives on New Year's Eve.

Others say the fires were functional, begun as navigational signals to help guide steamboats through the dense December fog; or religious, to light the way to midnight mass. Or the fires may have celebrated Epiphany, the Twelfth Night, when Christmas trees were taken down and burned, and chestnuts and potatoes roasted over the blaze. Most likely, the bonfires were introduced into the area by French Marist priests who, in 1864, took over Jefferson College (now Manresa House of Retreats) in nearby Convent. The Brothers built their

fires on the batture next to the river and entertained their students. The practice caught on, but why it was moved from the traditional New Year's Eve to Christmas Eve remains a mystery.

Whatever its origins, the German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society attributes the first Christmas Eve levee bonfire to merchant George Bourgeois in the town of Mt. Airy in 1884. He is said to have collected boxes and packing material in which merchandise for his New Camelia Plantation store arrived, massing them into a flaming heap on the levee across from his business. The flames were so large and salutatory that riverboats pulled right up to his landing to join the Christmas Eve celebration. Bourgeois had also built a game room behind his store where local men played poker and ate gumbo. Sometimes, when they arrived with their sons in tow, the entrepreneur gave the boys fireworks and sent them off to the levee to entertain themselves around a bonfire.

By the turn of the century, says Leonce Haydel, the area's acknowledged unofficial historian, scattered private bonfires were built on Christmas Eve. Trash wood, scrap lumber, old boxes, cardboard, tires and anything else that fathers and sons could scavenge made

a good bonfire in those early days.

Whether social pressure eventually demanded a grander style than that of a trash heap, or whether safety demanded more careful construction, the configuration of levee bonfires evolved from amorphous piles into a conical tepee shape. After World War II the bonfire tradition began to strengthen; and the individual bonfires began to reach higher with the introduction of the pyramid shape: the neat, articulated superstructure imposed over a tepee.

Gathering the wood (willow, which is abundant and fast-growing, is the material of choice) is still largely a father-and-son affair. Today a boy's rite of passage is likely to be the first time he uses a chain saw or the day he's allowed to drive the pickup truck, swaying with a bed of ragtag willow poles, back to the levee.

There, on December weekends, the entire community congregates, either to build bonfires or to offer moral support to those who do. The big night itself has evolved into a typical southern Louisiana festival, with souvenir hunters in search of logoed sweatshirts, and long lines of people waiting for a fresh batch of cracklins. But at its heart, Bonfires on the Levee is still a family-style celebration.

### *It's time...*

... In August, 1985, Jerry Forchette and I met in Minneapolis, and I agreed to become co-editor of *Chez Nous* with her. Some years later, Jerry moved home to Chippewa Falls WI, and I took on this little periodical on my own. Early on, I decided we should have a regular schedule, which would provide some discipline to our work. And so we went on a six issue per year schedule, which we missed only once...until this year, when I began to run out of emotional "gas" for this labor of love.

But on it has gone...as I calculate, this is the 98<sup>th</sup> issue spanning 17 years that I've been partially or totally responsible for. It has been a long run for a strictly voluntary effort. And it's time to move away from it, at least for awhile, and maybe forever. Some have said, "why not go for 100 issues?", and it's been tempting. But enough is enough. And we have a fine alternative, far more professional than *Chez Nous*, which will be coming to you in 2002. You will enjoy *Le Forum*.

The "pay" for this volunteer job has been the knowledge I have gained about the wonderful French-Canadian culture, and how it has fit in to the history of this state and nation. I can't say I've become a scholar of things French-Canadian, but I am far more conversant on the topic than I was when I first typed copy for the first very rough issue in the fall of 1985, sitting in Hibbing, Minnesota.

The pay has also been the many marvelous people I have met in the course of these many years.

I will not end with "au revoir" or "adieu", since I will continue to be an active member, and to participate in the activities of this fine societe. I wish you all the very, very best.

*Dick Bernard. 1-2-02*

**Notes to Members:**

**S'il vous plait, very important:** Due to a computer malfunction, we lost our membership list and have had to reconstruct it to the extent that we can. If you know members who have been getting *Chez Nous*, ask them if they received this issue. If they did not, send their name and address to Dick Bernard, 6905 Romeo Road, Woodbury MN 55125-2421. Also, if you have not paid your dues, please do so. Single and Senior Citizen \$12; Senior couples and singles \$15; family \$18. Checks to LSCF, sent to John England, treasurer, 2002 Palace Ave, St. Paul MN 55105.

**La Societe's Mardi Gras potluck will be at St. Louis Catholic Church, St. Paul, on Saturday evening, February 9,** beginning at 6:30. Come and join us for an enjoyable evening.

**The theme for St. Paul's annual Festival of Nations is "Gatherings". This years event is April 25-28.** LaSociete has been involved in this program for many years, and will be again this year. We will be needing many volunteers to staff our booth at this Festival. Sera Byrne at 612-309-8325 or [seraphineb@aol.com](mailto:seraphineb@aol.com) will be accepting help for all days of this program, as well as ideas for the booth.

**The annual meeting of LaSociete C-F will be Monday evening, June 3, 7 p.m.** at St. Louis Catholic Church.

**Mark in your calendar, June 23, the eve of St. Jean-Baptiste Day.** On this date, each year for the last five, the Minnesota Historical Society Sibley House site at Old Mendota has sponsored an ever-more festival on its grounds. Watch for information in local media or through the Minnesota Historical Society.



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