

THE d'ARRAS FAMILY IN Canada

Louis Stanislas Xavier had five children, including three sons: Nicolas, Edouard and the youngest, Constant.

All of Nicolas's children had descendants in the Belgian Ardennes. Gustave, Edouard's son, had chosen in 1890 to move to the United States.

The six children of Constant all choose to expatriate. Three of them settled in Paris; they no longer have any current descendants. Three other sons, Arsène, Elie and Omer, also chose exile and settled in Canada in the very first years of the 20th century.

Two phenomena came into play. On the one hand, with vigorous demography and the significant reduction in infant mortality, population growth in the Ardennes villages became so big that people had to go and settle elsewhere to ensure their subsistence. On the other hand, the enormous need for a population contribution from North America and the effectiveness of the “recruiting agents” who encourage Belgians to come and settle there.

The recruitment of migrants for Canada.

By expanding westward, the Government of Canada planned the colonization of the “Grande Prairie”, the entire center of this vast country: the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. As the railway advances towards the Pacific, these immensities are cut into squares of 65 hectares which are just waiting for hands to clear and exploit them.



MacLeod station, Alberta



Clearing in Deleau, Manitoba

There was therefore an immense need for manpower; it was necessary to encourage an immigration which today is called “chosen”.

Some countries were privileged: the Anglo-Saxon countries, of course, but also Belgium. The Belgians were reputed to be hard-working, Catholic, very competent in certain fields and, for some, French-speaking. Migrations were also accompanied by a transfer of knowledge. Canada had, for example, requested assistance from the Gembloux Agronomic Institute and the Vilvoorde School of Horticulture to share their expertise. The Belgians have thus contributed, among other things, to the development of the cultivation of flax, sugar beet, of the dairy industry, etc.



Harvest in Brandon, Manitoba

The Belgians also imported draft horses from their country, mainly chestnut and Percheron races, to breeding, as this was the case of Arsène. On the industrial side, the Belgians were sought after for their mining and glassmaking skills, among others.

For their part, maritime companies have developed to transport millions of people from all over Europe. The best known in Antwerp was the Red Star Line. At the beginning, it was often necessary to join England to reach North America. After there were direct connections Antwerp to New York and finally, from 1903, a direct line to Canada. Transport conditions remained rudimentary. What mattered was transporting the greatest number of migrants. On the way back, these same boats most often transported merchandise and cattle.

It was not just official agents of the Canadian government who were active in Belgium. There were a number of personal initiatives to develop some areas to be settled, on the southern border of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Two initiatives in particular hold our attention. Around 1888, an arrival of Belgians settled on the southern border of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Their parish priest, Father Jean Gaire, is Alsatian. These twenty-eight families have created their new parish “Grande Clairière”. Subsequently, other Belgian settlers have created Deleau (named after a Belgian settler) and others have reinforced another nearby colony, on the Souris River.

Sébastien Deleau recruited the future inhabitants of this region among his friends and neighbors in his native province of Belgian Luxembourg. He was therefore a so-called “repatriate – recruiter”, whose trip was paid by the Canadian government. Many families from Gembes and Haut-Fays left for Canada (after 1887) to settle in Manitoba at Deleau and Grande Clairière.

As we see below, Arsène and his future wife, Céline, left separately for Canada, but they both ended up in Manitoba in this small agricultural area colonized by Belgians, and more particularly those from the Ardennes.

All the families were large and headed for Saskatchewan to create Bellegarde. These localities have remained French-speaking and Bellegarde is the only locality to have maintained its Walloon character (Luxemburgish Walloon accent, popular legends and beliefs, etc.).

We find in Bellegarde families from Daverdisse (Arnould, Lamotte), from Haut-Fays (Coliaux, Dauvin, Davreux, Renaud, Delvenne, Gatin, Nannan), from Gembes (Montjoie, Renard, Wilvers), from Redu (Bauche, Deloitte, Mahin, Mahy), Maissin (Bertholet), Naomé (Dumonceau), Opont (Georges, Questiaux) and many other localities in the region of Bertrix and Neufchâteau.

Arsène d'Arras d'Haudrecy et Céline Daigmont

Arsène, Constant's eldest son, was born in Daverdisse on January 20, 1873.

We find his trace and that of his brother Elie in 1904 in Liverpool. They must have come a little earlier from Antwerp and are about to embark for Canada. It is not always easy to spot people on ship passenger boarding lists. This administrative process is not done as currently on the basis of identity papers, but rather orally between people who do not speak the same language! On March 29, 1904, the "Lake Erie" left Liverpool for Saint Jean (or Saint John) in New Brunswick, at the eastern tip of Canada.



SS Lake Erie

On board, "Arrsele Daras" (29 years old) and "Haly Daras" (26 years old); both are "foreigners" and "single". I only remembered this information after realizing the phonetic difference between English and French, or even Walloon. "Elie" is pronounced "Elijah" in English. The transcription "Haly" by an English speaker is therefore closer to the Walloon pronunciation of « Elie ».

What did they do when they landed in Saint John, New Brunswick on April 12, 1904? How was the reception of immigrants there?

Of course, their decision to emigrate to Canada was not made on a whim. They were not driven by an emergency such as war or religious persecution. Throughout their youth, they saw men and families leave their village and surrounding areas for the United States and Canada. These departures were to be the subject of many conversations in these village communities and the exchanges of letters were to feed them. They were aware of the

existence of this small Francophone community in southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I keep a letter that a friend of my grandfather had written to him from Bellegarde in 1912.

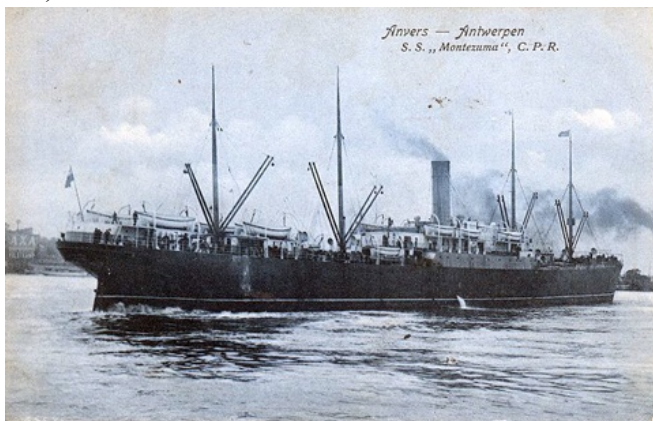
The list of passengers disembarking at Saint John is interesting. It specifies that Arsène and Elie want to go to Deleau. This list done at the exit of the boat identifies the immigrants. They get off in groups and we find Arsène and Elie with other people also going to Deleau.

It is clear that the project had been prepared in Belgium well before the departure.

Afterwards, we know that Elie is listed in the directory of “Western Land Grants”. He obtained land in Humboldt (Saskatchewan). We have not so far had access to the document itself, which should allow us to precisely date this transfer. What is certain is that the two brothers do not settle in the same place. Arsène therefore settled in Manitoba. Oral transmission in Canada said that Arsène and Céline had met “in a little French community in Manitoba”. That's what happened.

Céline was born in Haut-Fays in 1884; Arsène in Daverdisse in 1873. Daverdisse and Haut-Fays are two neighboring villages in the Belgian Ardennes. It is clear that the families knew each other when they were in Belgium. Céline was 21 when she arrived in Canada, but she didn't come alone, the whole family emigrated. However, his father, Henri Joseph, was not very young, he was 54 years old. He was a “stave maker”, that is to say a carpenter specializing in the wood used to make barrels. They didn't leave Haut-Fays and the surrounding area alone. In addition, they knew people and families who had already settled in Manitoba around Deleau and Grande Clairière. Perhaps they had remained in epistolary contact with some?

A certain Jean-Baptiste Delbrouck and his wife Marie Volion left for Deleau in 1904. Jean-Baptiste picked up his parents in Belgium the following year. They took the same boat as the Daigmont, as well as the Naviaux family. This small troop left Antwerp on May 2, 1905 aboard the Montezuma. They arrived two weeks later, on May 17, in Quebec (see photo below).



SS Montezuma in the port d'Antwerp



Port of Quebec

The Daigmont family settled in Deleau, later in Brandon. Arsène is in Hartney. Hartney and Deleau are 14 km apart. They married on April 7, 1910 in Cameron, a municipality bordering Hartney.



Hartney, Manitoba – Main street

The 1911 census mentions them in Brandon where the Daigmont parents lived. Arsène was a self-employed “farmer”. Later, they went, like other families, to help in the development of Bellegarde (Saskatchewan).



Harvest in Bellegarde, Saskatchewan

The entire sector forms a small island which today has 20,000 Francophones (“Fransaskois”) among the million Anglophones inhabiting Saskatchewan (20 times the area of Belgium).

Arsène and Céline remained in contact with Belgium. On a photo sent to my grandfather Alexandre, we can see Arsène holding a horse. Céline wrote that “the cousin says he has 16 like that”. In fact, he bred Belgian draft horses that were well-known in Canada.

Arsène died still young in 1923, at the age of 50. His grave is still visible in the cemetery of Bellegarde. Later, Céline remarried and left Bellegarde with her three children to settle in Calgary. She died in Vancouver in 1957.

Elie d’Arras d’Haudrecy

Elie, Constant's third child, was born in Daverdisse in 1874.

As I have just detailed, Elie left Daverdisse with his brother Arsène for Antwerp, then Liverpool. From there, they embarked for Saint John in New Brunswick where they arrived on April 12, 1904.



Port of Saint-John, New-Brunswick

Curiously, the two brothers didn’t stay together. Before 1910, Elie was granted land in Humboldt (Saskatchewan). These lands, a square in one piece, total 67 hectares. This is huge compared to the farms of the same time in the Ardennes, and compared to the still limited use of mechanization.

We therefore find Elie in the censuses of 1911 and 1916 in Humboldt. As he was single in 1911, he must have married Margaret McKenna between 1911 and 1914.



Humboldt, Saskatchewan – Main street

The family later settled in Saskatchewan, further north in Meota, as evidenced by the 1926 census.

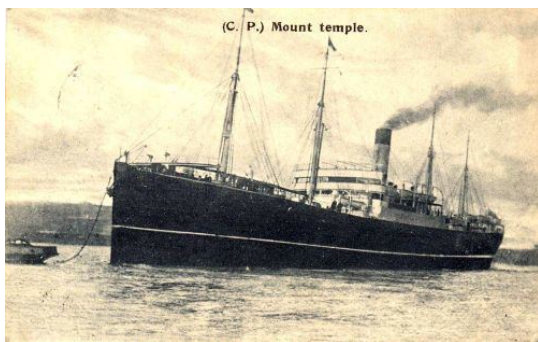
Elie and Margaret had four children: Albert, John (who died at 3 months), Mary and Alice.

Elie died in 1935 and Margaret in 1938. They are both buried in North Battleford.

Omer d'Arras d'Haudrecy

Omer was born in Daverdisse on September 11, 1877.

It didn't take long for him to imitate his brothers, Arsène and Elie. He left Antwerp a year later, at the beginning of April 1905. He also embarked for Saint John, New Brunswick where he landed on April 18, 1905. He sailed aboard the "Mount Temple" which provided in winter a connection London - Antwerp - Saint John or Halifax. In summer, when the ice no longer blocks the Saint Laurent, it went up to Montreal. It was a large steamboat that had been refitted to transport as many immigrants as possible. Omer arrived on April 18, 1905 with 1 922 immigrants. It's a record. The "Winnipeg Tribune" (Manitoba) announced the record the same day. Indeed, these migrants left Saint John directly by special trains for Montreal, then for Winnipeg. They were assigned to "Manitoba and the Territories".



SS Mount Temple

Omer became a naturalized Canadian in 1909.

He didn't colonize land like his two brothers. All his life, he was described as "plowing". He corresponded with his brothers, he mentioned Arsène as a contact ("value man") when crossing the border with the United States. We have found, in fact, an administrative document that had to be completed to cross the American border. It dates from September 12, 1910. It mentions that Omer "Darros" crosses the border at Eastport (Idaho) coming from British Columbia. It also mentions that he lived until then in MacLeod (Alberta).



MacLeod, Alberta – Main street

Omer mentioned that he wanted to settle in Spokane (Washington State). Who did he work for? In which sector? What was he going to do in Spokane? I think he shouldn't have left alone but with other "labourers". He was probably going there, but I can't find out what he has done there and how long he has been staying there. What is certain is that he returned to Saskatchewan.

We find him, thanks to the 1916 census, in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. We learn that he married between 1911 and 1914 with Virginia Henson (or Henron). Indeed, in 1916, they were parents of two children: Henry (2 years) and Hellen (5 months).

The 1921 Swift Current census informs us of the birth of John (1 year old), but also that Virginia was a widow. Omer must have died in 1920 or early 1921, aged around 45-46.



Swift Current, Saskatchewan – 11th ave. - 1911

To the difficulty of emigrating, of making a new life in a completely new environment, both professionally and family-wise, we can add the tragedy of the premature death of the father of a large family, the only "breadwinner" of his family. This is the case of Gustave in the USA, Arsène and Omer in Canada.