

The power to this area went off about 4 o'clock Sunday morning and didn't come back on until 4 o'clock that afternoon. I found that 12 hours can be a long time to be without central heat. Clad in my street clothes plus a very heavy winter coat, I listened to the unfolding drama engendered by the many, many messages relating to the storm. My battery operated radio was my only source of information except for the telephone. During this period of "incarceration", it seemed that time stood still. I kept looking at my watch only to find that it had moved only two or three minutes since I had looked before. The time was especially long because there was no power to cook with. After a dry cereal breakfast I kept on eating something every little while - there was nothing else to do! When the lights came on at 4 o'clock, it was time to blow out my two kerosene lamps which had once more performed their duty in a faithful way as they had in that long ago back on the farm. What a blessing to hear the furnace, refrigerator and sump-pump motors run again. What a blessing to be back in the twentieth century!

Meanwhile, the flood which would eventually get here, was in full progress in the southern section of the Valley. The pressure of billions of tons of water made the otherwise modest Red River into one, long, moving lake from four to six miles which flowed over or around anything in its path. This had to be squeezed in between relatively narrow waters between the banks in Greater Grand Forks. However, the rampaging waters could not be contained and levees gave way in several places in spite of super-human efforts to reinforce them.

A few days of cold weather had delayed the inevitable. Then at 6 a.m. on Friday, April 18th, whining sirens screamed and the evacuation of 3000 residents from Grand Forks Lincoln Drive had begun. The dikes in this area are 15 to 20 feet high. Later, all of the area's 50,000 people were evacuated or left of their own accord. The hundreds of volunteers, policemen, firemen and National Guardsmen had lost the fight to save the cities but they had put up a good fight.

As mentioned before, all the TV stations and all except one or two radio stations had been silenced by the sleet storm. And the Grand Forks Herald building had fallen to the blaze. KFGO radio at Fargo supplied much of the local news. Bismarck was much better supplied with news, and my two

daughters living there were fairly screaming at me over the telephone to get out. On Saturday afternoon, April 19th, Barbara came to get me and the lady who was soon to become my wife, Clara Murphy. I was to spend 3 weeks as a guest of my daughter, Joyce, and Clara spent that time with her sister in Center ND. The streets were dry in the southwestern part of Grand Forks, where I live, and the country side harbored a few pot holes in the field. On the surface, it seemed there was little to worry about. But nearer to the Red River, the streets had become supplementary little rivers with popping manhole covers. The massive evacuation was on the way.

Where did all the people go? Many were

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CHEZ NOUS
SEP-OCT, 1997

On Writing a Family History

by Sr. Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ

From the Editor: Sr. Ann is an historian for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and continues to be involved in history projects at Bethany Convent in St. Paul where she is writing a book, Seeds on Good Ground, about pioneer Sisters of St. Joseph for the community's sesquicentennial in St. Paul 2001 A.D. She is a loyal member of LaSociete and is well-rooted in the French-Canadian culture of Quebec and the Twin Cities (she grew up in southeast Minneapolis). Here, Sister Ann shares her thoughts on writing a family history, which she shared with her own family in 1984. She provides a useful, common-sense, framework for anyone who has ever thought of writing their own history. **The editor would urge particular note to her comments about the relative lack of historical record of women. We perhaps can not rewrite the past, but we can make certain that the women we remember in our lives can be more completely described for the benefit of those who follow us. Thank you, Sister Ann.**

"[For] Christmas [1984] I gave a present of a family history to members of my immediate family consisting of three brothers, a sister, nine nephews and nieces. The present was a result of a question my oldest nephew posed when he asked, "Is there something wrong with my father's father? I have never heard anything about him." It struck me that my nephew was talking about my own father and that my parents died when the generation to which

the nephew belonged were either very young or had not yet been born.

Now, I had been collecting genealogical material about my family since college days when my psychology teacher asked for information about that subject. Gradually through the years, I had acquired a massive array of materials: ancestor/pedigree charts, documents, newspaper clippings, maps, certificates, letters, pictures of places and people, names and dates, census/cemetery/church/government records, etc., gotten through extensive correspondence, oral history interviews, exchange of data, trips, telephone calls plus membership and meetings with members of genealogical societies (Minnesota Genealogical Society; NWTF&CHI; Urbain Baudreau Graveline Genealogical Association). In order to be able to know what I had, I organized this material into a number of three ring notebooks - each one having to do with a specific branch of our family.

Now, the question before me was: what to share with my family without becoming so bogged down with details that the reader would quickly lose interest. I had watched various methods and techniques people used in collecting data about ancestors. Some were mainly interested in names and dates. Some traced people who had a specific last name. Others loved to fill in ancestor/pedigree charts. Since I had been a history teacher for some 35 years and later spent nine years in intensive historical research about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, a congregation to which I belong, I wanted my family to know much more about their ancestors than a collection of names and dates. Therefore, I set down some specific rules and criteria: A) the selected information had to be of primary interest to those receiving the gift; B) divide the material into two sections - one relating to my father and the other to my mother; C) establish an outline of questions to answer for each person I would write about. Once I had established my mode of procedure, I began to write in earnest.

Each section was divided into segments and the first segment was titled "Recollections about my Father, James Jacob Sampson, Sr." by Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson. I described in a succinct form everything I could about his parents, where/when he was born, names of his 12 brothers and sisters and whom they married, places where he moved, grew up, worked, education, work, marriages, death, etc.

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I also xeroxed copies of pictures I had of him and was careful to type up information about each. There were many questions I could not answer; therefore, in my description, I suggested that my brothers and sisters could be of help since they lived with my father longer than I did (I entered the convent at the age of 19.) I was careful to see that the same title was used at the top of each typewritten page and each was numbered in correct numerical progression. I had seen too many loose-leaf notebooks come apart and pages mixed up because they were not marked correctly. At the end of my recollections, I listed all of my father's direct descendants and whom they married: children, grandchildren, great grandchildren - so the reader could know exactly where he/she fit into the picture.

Then I did the same for his father: "Zepherin Samson, Father of James Jacob Sampson, Sr.", again being sure that this title was used on each succeeding page - but numbering each page all over again. This would allow for expansion of the first segment by the reader who might want to add data, etc. Again I used the same pattern and ended with the direct descendants. This time, the list was much longer since Zepherin was the father of 13 children. Then I did the third segment on his wife: Ellen LaVallee Sampson, Mother of James Jacob Sampson, Sr."

Since I had very little information about Zepherin's parents, other than what I wrote in his segment, I turned my attention to "Daniel Louis LaVallee, Grandfather of James Jacob Sampson, Sr." The information plus the pictures of this man who became the father of 12 daughters and step-father of his niece whose mother had died at childbirth, became more and more interesting and the list of direct descendants more exciting. Ten of his daughters grew to adulthood on a farm near French Lake and married men of French-Canadian descent, in St. Vincent's Church, Osseo, MN. Some of the names included: Zepherin Samson, Medard Arseneau, Francis Xavier LeClair, Moses Des Lauriers, Daniel Bottineau, Alexander Pouliot, Peter Dupuis, Felix Dansereau, Pierre Joly, Cyprien Gorham, Narcisse Counoyer, Sidney Potvin and Emile LeFebvre. I will not attempt to give you the numerous ways these names were spelled. I also gave names and addresses of people who might be able to give more information about each of these families. I did the same for Daniel's wife: "Basiles

Baudreau Graveline LaVallee, Grandmother of James Jacob Sampson, Sr." I had a picture of her with 10 of her daughters and another where she was the oldest of five living generations - so I incorporated these into her segment - and listed the descendants again.

The last two segments had to do with "Joseph Baudreau Graveline, Great grandfather of James Jacob Sampson, Sr." And "Josephte Fortier Baudreau Graveline, Great grandmother of James Jacob Sampson, Sr." These two with a number of their children had come to St. Paul from Sorel, Quebec, about 1847. They were the only ones for whom I had no pictures; however, I had ancestor charts back to France and included a direct listing. I had the location about where they lived on Robert Street, St. Paul, and copies of marriage records of some of their children in the St. Paul log cabin Cathedral which later became St. Joseph's Academy where our Sisters taught. Other French names were added to my list - people whom their children had married: Michael Auger, Eleanor Donais, Emmanuel Dube, Edward Boisvert (Greenwood) and Pierre Turgeon. I again gave names and addresses of people who might aid the reader to know more about these people so that I would not be writing down information that would confuse the ones for who I was essentially writing. At this point, I felt I had fulfilled my goal of one half of the project, and I turned my attention to my mother's side of the family.

My mother, "Frances Blankenhorn, Wife of Thomas J. Shanahan; Wife of James Jacob Sampson, Sr." was married twice and her list of descendants was a bit different than those of my father because she had a son by her first marriage. I wrote a long recollection of her, then went on to her parents: "Richard Blankenhorn, Father of Frances Blankenhorn Sampson" and "Mary Barbara Surges Blankenhorn, Mother of Frances Blankenhorn Sampson". A different set of names began to emerge as I listed people who were married: Boughton, Kartak, Brombach, Egesberger, Hammer, Hauck, Hamack, Avery, etc. Then onto "Johann Christian Blankenhorn, Grandfather of Frances Blankenhorn", and "Katherine Schreiner Blankenhorn, Grandmother of Frances Blankenhorn Sampson". This whole section was much shorter due to the fact that A) the family relationship was much smaller; B) records were not that available; C)

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much of the information was gotten through the oral history method from my mother's sisters before they died.

What did I personally learn from this Family History Project? A) outstanding characteristics, talents, physical traits I seem to have inherited from each side of my family; B) vast variety of ways of spelling names, particularly the French ones. This was due to the fact that when my ancestors came to Minnesota, they could speak little or no English. Those taking the census, wrote the names down as they heard them pronounced. As years went by, some went by nicknames and some changed their names to an English equivalent. My mother's side remained consistent because they were better educated and there were fewer names to change; C) the very small amount of documented information given about the women. They are usually referred to as mother, wife, daughter, and once in a while, they are mentioned in relationship to wills and dowries. Since a woman who marries, changes her name, I can see why so many genealogical enthusiasts track down people with a consistent last name. A number of interesting biographical sketches are now being written and published about the earliest settlers from France to new France. I have found three of my ancestors among them and had a cousin, Florence Sampson Fredricksen, professor of French for 40 years at Gustavus Adolphus College, MN, translate them into English for me. The paucity of information about women is very much in evidence. D) Learn how to separate myth from fact. Each family has stories that have been handed down. There seems to be an element of truth in them so I put them down and gave my sources. E) Dates vary. I have found people baptized before they were born! Put the various dates down; however, do not get an ulcer over which one is absolutely correct. F) Be sure to put down the names of direct descendants down after each person. I ran into the problem of second marriages, divorces, change of names, one parent families, etc. The listing of descendants for each person written about, helps to clarify the relationships.

What was the reaction of my family who received the three ring notebooks as a present? Absolutely delightful! A niece in Montana wrote to say that she spent three hours on Christmas Eve reading it and wished that a whole book of

recollections could be written about my mother. Her son has been asking her questions about the family and he can now make use of it for school projects as well as for his own knowledge. Another niece wanted to know what a milliner is. My mother had made her living as a widow by that profession. One brother who had worked for the telephone company became intrigued with the initials and numbers on a calling card I had xeroxed about my father's business. He did some research and found that at one time our area in Minneapolis had two telephone companies T.S. (Tri State) and E. (Bell). A man in business had to have two phone numbers. My sister in New York called to say that the present had generated much conversation and discussion between her and her children. Now the latter wanted to learn about their father's side of the family. All of the readers were amazed at the number of names that were listed and were interested to know more about them. Hopefully, some will take the time to jot down the information and add it to their family history.

Another whole group of relatives was interested in the project. A family reunion of the Podvin/Podvin relations was and I was invited to come and show the fruits of my labor. Many wanted to purchase copies. This is where the idea of the segments comes in very handy. Since all of this research involved much time, money, etc., I had to work out an equitable amount of money to be charged - and I hoped they would have other information, pictures, documents, etc., to share with me. This is an unending project filled with surprises, fun, newly found relatives as well as many unanswered questions....

One last footnote. When I gave my present, I enclosed a letter to each recipient to explain what it was all about. I listed the people whom I had researched and advised them to read the contents slowly and at different times; otherwise they would get a good case of genealogical indigestion. Thus, the first page really has a table of contents so that other readers know in a few short paragraphs what the project is all about, and for whom it was essentially written. As other more distant relatives ask for copies, this letter will be revised to show what the essential relationship between them and the contents is all about."

Fete du St. Jean-Baptiste

by LeRoy DuBois



LeRoy DuBois, at right, waits his turn as Lauri Bernard twirls. Jane Peck, center, led.

Tuesday, 24 June, saw a reenactment of an 1840s French-Canadian Fete du St. Jean-Baptiste at the Sibley House in Mendota MN. This was a premier event at this new Minnesota Historical Society site.

When we arrived, a merry bonfire was already blazing in a spot behind the Sibley House. Couples in period costumes sat on benches and logs, clapping to jig music played by a slightly built young lad on an ancient fiddle.

Hey, I see Dick Bernard and his daughter, Lauri. And here come Ralph and Diane Germain and George and Bonnie LaBrosse. Looks like we'll have some fun after all. Hey, mon Vieux, Jane Peck is coming. She's an expert at native and period dances. I hear that she even studied in France.

Before I know what, Jane signals to the fiddler, two young damoiselles grab me by the arms, and I'm twirling around about a hundred miles an hour. Then come schottisches, more jigs, some American Indian dances, a Greek one, and maybe a Scotch and Irish one. Mon Dieu, these old 75-year old legs finally collapsed, but not before I had outdanced all of the kids. Quel fete! Quelle musique! Quel fun!

Prospective member? Checks for membership dues should be made to LSCF and sent to John England, 2002 Palace Ave St Paul 55105. Dues: \$10 (\$8 senior); Family \$15 (\$10 senior). Membership includes subscription to Chez Nous.