

The Origins of La Passe

By L'Abbe Joseph E. Gravelle

Many Parishes on the Ottawa River have historical names in memory of men who played an important role in the past. The name of La Passe is however slightly different. It was given to a village in the County of Renfrew in Ontario where the waters of the river were calmer and the distance between the two shores was narrower.

The first farmers to establish themselves in the region travelled for supplies to Fort-Coulonge which was located on the north shore of the Ottawa River. This fort, in 1830 belonged to the Hudson Bay Company as did Fort William located 20 miles upstream. After the Indians moved out of the forest from the shores of the Coulonge River, the fort was abandoned and the families of La Passe traveled only to the Coulonge Trading Post, which still exists in the village.

The first families to come to the lands of La Passe, Westmeath and Beachburg originated from Rigaud, Pointe Claire, Vaudreuil and St-Eustache (in Quebec). However, we are unaware of the circumstances regarding the arrival of these first settlers. The registers of the Cathedral of Ottawa would indicate that Fathers Pascal Brunet and W. Cannon came for a visit to l'Île-du-Grand-Calumet and La Passe in 1836 to perform marriages and baptisms. On May 19th 1839 in La Passe, Father P.E. Poire baptised Ambroise Gervais, son of Cyrille Gervais and Veronique Sabourin. The parents of Cyrille Gervais were Francois Gervais and Charlotte Mongeon who were married in Pointe-aux-Trembles in 1796. Veronique Sabourin was born in 1813 in Rigaud and was the daughter of Charles Sabourin and Marie-Anne Bedard.

Charles Sabourin and Marie-Anne Bedard have many descendants still living in La Passe. Another daughter, Pauline, married Ignace Manseair or Mousseau, and their daughter Celinaire married Jean-Baptiste Godin of Grand Calumet. The father of Jean-Baptiste Godin, Ambroise Godin, was born in 1779 and died at the age of 113 in 1928.

The registers from Buckingham revealed that another daughter of Charles Sabourin, Marie, married Jacques or Jacob Romain on October 13th, 1838 in Grand-Calumet. Marie was born in 1788 and died in La Passe at the age of 95 in 1883.

Theophile Bertrand dit (said) Pembina, son of Joachim Bertrand and Josette Morin of Chateauguay, married Monique Neveu in 1812 in Rigaud. They came to La Passe in 1839, because Theophile served as Godfather to Ambroise Gervais. The Godmother was Appolyne Sabourin, wife of Ignace Monseau.

The six children of Theophile Bertrand all resided in La Passe. They were, Caroline, married to Etienne Primeau, David, born in 1823 and married to Marguerite Simmons, Theophile, born in 1821 and married to Marie-Claire Maleau, Francois, born in 1818 and married to Zoe Leclair from l'Île Perrot, Clement born in 1823 and married to Delphine Leclair and Joachim, born in 1830 and married to Julie Raymond.

Louis Lamarche, born in 1801, son of Jean-Baptiste Lamarche and Marguerite Vaillant met Margaret Dolan in Levis, who was born in Ireland in 1812 and came to Canada in 1824. They were married in Bytown in 1833.

Another young Irish woman, Mary McCarthy born in 1817 came to Canada with Margaret Dolan. Mary McCarthy married Joseph Labine (the father). They are the grandparents of Gilbert Labine of Toronto, who discovered the Eldorado Mine.

The Labine family as well as the Marion, Dugas, Dupuis and Melancon families are Acadians who came to Canada from the United States and established themselves in the Parish of St-Jacques l'Achigan in the County of Montcalm in Quebec.

Jean-Baptiste Renaud was born in St-Eustache. He was the son of Joseph Renaud and Marguerite Mirond. He married Emilie Julien, widow of David Lacroix from Montreal, who was the father of David, born in 1830, Alfred born in 1831 and Louis Lacroix born in 1834, and all three Lacroix brothers were from La Passe. The marriage of Jean-Baptiste Renaud to Emilie Julien was celebrated in La Passe in 1839 was one of the first marriages performed at this mission.

LaPasse was one of the largest mission. In 1836 Father W. Cannon found a large congregation at this mission. The first church originates from this era. In 1839 Father John Brady found the church to be in disrepair. The mass was being celebrated at Francois Leclair's in Coulonge where the priests were billeted, or at J.B. Renaud's in La Passe.

The first high mass in La Passe was sung on June 12, 1836 by M. Brady and the next year Monseigneur Ignace Bourget made his first Pastoral visit.

In 1841 a wooden Chapel was built on the actual site of the current Presbytery. This Chapel served as the church, school and Presbytery. It was destroyed by fire in 1842. Another was built with the help of M. Adams of l'Île-du-Grand-Calumet. It measured 67 feet by 30 feet. Alexandre MacDonell of Sand Point and Joseph Aumont of Ottawa donated ten acres of land for the mission.

The first priest, the Reverend Father Antoine de Saunhac was appointed.

On October 3rd, 1858, his mission was Fort-Coulonge and Les Bois Francs. In 1830 another mission was added in Snake River for a period of one year in order to help pay for the construction of a Sacristy in La Passe.

In 1828 Monseigneur Narcisse-Zephirin Lorrain of Pembroke, named Reverend Father Thos-Nap Le-Moyne Priest of Lapasse. In 1886 he started construction of a new stone Church.

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