



Besançon Historical Society  
The Chronicles

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**Notes from a Conference with Father Charles Henry Banet**  
Saint Joseph's College, Rensselaer, IN, January 8, 1991

By Michael Roy Morow

**Continued from last issue of Chronicles. . . .**

Father Banet pointedly does *not* endorse the "French influence on America" school. The broad truth was the opposite – the French quickly Americanized. The same thing happened to them as to all other nationalities -- dissipation into the United States culture. He loans me a book taking the opposite view, stating that it is superficial -- "grade school stuff." But "that's all you are going to find of an historical nature." Sadly, it is also the best there is, and the best there is likely ever to be. Father Banet is also suspicious of some genealogists and what he calls pseudo-scholars "trying to build a monument to their genes." He clearly is sick of a particular aspect to certain researches which posit a continuing uniqueness of French culture, post-immigration, which he thinks is false and made-up. The French, overall, were a "very small part of the total American immigration picture," especially by this time, and had no chance of holding out as any sort of cultural enclave.

Indeed Father Banet's reaction to hyper-ethnicity – as held by Anglo-Americans - - is what spurred his research about the French in Allen County 41 years ago. At that time, at his priestly ordination, a whole lot of people "just showed up" -- people his father referred to generally as "kin." He may have known one of these as "Aunt Alice" or another as "Uncle Charly" but "they were fixtures of my father's life, not my own." He had not thought much about them, up to then, and basically taken them for granted. He then did not even know their last names, much less anything about Besançon. He was more influenced, in his upbringing, by his mother's German roots – a not untypical

situation.

But then, he wanted to send cards in appreciation of their coming to his ordination. And he started going through the people who had come with his father, getting their last names, and it was then he realized they were all French. Inquisitive person that he was, he wanted to know more about them, so went to the then very small genealogical corner of the Fort Wayne library. He gave the names to the librarian. But he was informed by the rather stiff and "waspy" young man in charge that "We *only* have information about the *important* people in the community." Here, Father Banet gives a good caricature of an upper-crust Britisher with a theatrical Masterpiece Theatre sort of accent. So, he continues, "Today, as a result of my own work, the French are *the* most important people in the vicinity, since there is simply so much more information about them for serious study."

Father Banet says his basic work has been translating the Saint Louis Besancon records, to show the proper French last names and how they would have been spelled. Some, he says, "don't know what they are looking at" insofar as either last or first names: "*Joannes* -- what's that?" This name would have been known to the French as Jean, to English as John. To simply repeat that name is just to copy the priest -- who wrote it down in Latin solely for reasons based on ancient Catholic Church law requiring Latin in all official documents. No one ever used that name, nor would have even known that the priest so wrote it. "This canon law has no relation or benefit to genealogy."

He then stresses he has done no "study" other than to compile data. Thus, his source for saying that Catherine Bouvier Reuille was Lutheran is the fact she is buried in a Lutheran cemetery -- which is a sound deduction based on religious custom at the time. However, in absence of a reliable aid such as that custom, he generally refrains from speculating beyond what records themselves show, except to correct obvious errors. For instance, Vaugnier could be Gautier -- simply a case of misspelling, the way he was able to correct "Fredine" to Predine in his translation of the Besancon records. He has

Besancon, France phone directories under his desk, and uses them for reference. Look in a good French dictionary, Father Banet advises, to learn the literal meaning of the names. He advises he could once read French literature without a dictionary, but "you have to keep at it." He would need a dictionary alongside to tackle a Flaubert or Stendahl novel today.

As he notes in one of his books, Claude was "the big name for men in the area because of Saint Claude of Besancon – for God and Saint Claude!" Virtually every man, he thinks, had Claude in his baptized name, as a second or even a third (unused) name. It would have at least been something of an honorific, like a confirmation name. Many women similarly had Claudia in their name. Many women's names were variants on men's names. Also many first names in this old area of France were of Roman derivation. A very common woman's name was Adrienne, which illustrates both tendencies. Besides Saint Claude, another important regional saint was Saint Pelage. Like the children of Julian Roy and Marie Gautier, all the Banet children were taught to pray in French.

Concluding, I have edited out much of a purely personal nature from these old notes – given the purpose of the Besancon newsletter. This does square, however, with the foundational nature of Father Banet's own Besancon work. I have also frankly tidied the notes up a bit for family consumption. Much of this conversation was conducted over a bottle of choice French brandy. It came out after about the first hour and hardly impaired the exchange. Regretfully, this is not the place for the full Father Banet portrait I would like to make, but hopefully a touch of that sneaks through. In short sum, Father Banet was a fascinating blend of the down to earth and the skeptical scholar. He was a Precious Blood priest and his piety plain and straight. He had a reputation as a very hard worker for his college, and in another of his endeavors was editor of a Catholic philosophical journal – an entirely different, and quite esoteric outlet for his active intellect and rich personality.

Scholars might be said to basically come either deductive – trusting hunches and instincts in dark areas – or reductive – trusting very little at all, and sticking strictly to the verifiable. Regarding Father Banet's Besancon work, one would say that his approach to genealogical research was determinedly reductive. There is room for both, of course. But especially where oral histories and untrustworthy documents are involved, such as censuses written down by government workers speaking another tongue, his "show me" attitude is very well taken. Having said that, I would also attribute his particular skepticism regarding French ethnic identity to his generational bent – which was the world war generation with a heavy partisanship to the idea of the American "melting pot." Also, like many scholars of the most seemingly diverse and even opposed backgrounds and attitudes, there is often nonetheless found a common trait of regarding laypersons working in their fields as intruding bumpkins, or worse. There was a decided trace of that in Father Banet, but always with a note of wry humor. All in all, Saint Louis Besancon is quite fortunate to have had a man of his mix of talents turn his searchlight on its original documents.

MISSION OF  
THE BESANCON HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

ARTICLE 11 - SECTION 2

The mission of the Besancon Historical Society of East Allen County, IN is to preserve, interpret and foster a deeper understanding of the history, heritage, and other culture of the rural community known as Besancon, Indiana, generally located in Jefferson Township, Allen County, Indiana, and which has as its central focus Saint Louis Catholic Church.

Established 1994

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**LOOK FOR BHS ON INTERNET**

[www.Besanconhistory.org](http://www.Besanconhistory.org)

## **Bibliography of Charles Henry Banet, C.P.P.S., Relating to the Saint Louis Besancon Community**

### ***Books***

Courchaton, Departement de la Haute Saône: Registres Paroissiaux 1670-1792 / Actes de la Commune 1793-1852 (Rensselaer, Indiana 1981).

French Immigrants in Allen County 1850-1870 (Rensselaer, Indiana 1976).

Index to the Catholic Parish of Saint George, Vesoul, Haute Saône 1595-1793  
(Rensselaer, Indiana)

Index to the Records of Saint Louis Church at Besancon, Indiana 1865-1907  
(Rensselaer, Indiana 1981).

Records of Coulevon, Haute Saône: Registers Paroissiaux 1556-1793  
(Rensselaer, Indiana).

### ***With Alfred Rondot***

Alexis Litot, French Family of Allen County, Indiana (1979).

Claude Francis Ternet and Justine Rondot of Allen County, Indiana: Family Genealogy  
(1981).

### ***Recorded Lectures***

French Research, a More Genealogy cassette tape produced by Repeat Performance, no. ROS 22 (date unknown; source unknown; 1 hour).

Roman Catholic Records, a More Genealogy cassette tape produced by Repeat Performance, no. ROS 06 (date unknown; source unknown; 1 hour).

United States Church Records: Roman Catholic, cassette tape no. COO-55 from National Genealogical Society 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference (Columbus, Ohio, January 1986).

### ***Supplements to Father Banet's Work by Research Associates***

A Historical Survey of the French American Society of Allen County, Indiana 1902-1923  
(As Ascertained through Articles of the Journal Gazette, by Brother Edward P. Habrowski, C.P.P.S.) (Unpublished, Date Unknown; custody of Michael Morow).

Place or Town of Origin of Allen County, Indiana French Surnames, 1800-1900 found in the Couchaton, Haute Saone, French Register 1670-1852, by Alfred B. Rondot (Fort Wayne, Indiana 1980).



***President's Message ... Barbara Gorney***

The old cemetery at Besancon that had a very low area behind the large cross and at the back is now fixed! The tombstones in that area had fallen over and were hard to read. An outside firm was contracted and in one week in November they moved the stones, filled in the area to make it level and proceeded to replace the stones on the concrete slab. There are two 30 foot slabs on which the tombstones were placed. Now all the stones are in two rows and have even been cleaned. The large fir tree in the back was removed so that the rows could be straightened. What a difference! I was there on the Friday when the workers were finishing. I could read the stones without any trouble. There is also enough room between the rows so that the lawn mower can easily go through. I am very pleased that the historical society could help in this endeavor. Thanks to all that have contributed in this effort of keeping the cemetery looking well kept.

Two new items have been added to the Besancon Historical Society website. One is First Communion names 1903-1922 and second is Confirmations 1903-1923. Not all years are included but in 1909 the list includes the Confirmation name taken and who administered the Confirmation. Sponsors are also listed for the Confirmation classes. Adam Barrone still manages the website. Adam also takes care of the websites for Four Presidents Corners and Mary Penrose Wayne Chapter of the DAR. He works at the Allen County Library in the genealogy section.

Paulding County Ohio is working on a very long project. The unmarked graves in Paulding County are being researched through various records in order to find a name for that site. Adam Barrone had access to the names of people who died in Allen County, IN but were buried in Paulding County. This information was sent to the library at Paulding and has greatly aided in the research being done. Working together sure can produce great results.

In the archives there are two interesting certificates. These were signed by Herman J. Alerding, Bishop of Fort Wayne. They state that \$100 was paid for the celebration of a yearly mass for 50 years! One is for Alphonse Lomont and the other for John and Hannah Dignan. The date on both is July 5<sup>th</sup> 1906. Has anyone seen anything like this? Send me an e-mail if you recall any interesting facts or papers.

Wishing all happy holidays.

***Barbara***

## *Friends of Besancon.....*

**A Big Thank You to all who have already contributed to Cemetery Restoration Project!!** See President's Message and following info letter and pics on next page!

**Mr. Duane Sutter:** Passed away on Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>. At Methodist Hospital, Indianapolis. He had had surgery for an aneurysm. He was 77. He helped catalog the new cemetery. Our deepest sympathy to his wife, Elaine.

Thank you to **Don Didier** for more family info.pertaining to last Chronicles' "Wedding" notice WOLF-MCKERRING of 1906.

NOTE: Mrs. Louisa McKerring was a younger sister to Mary Jane Roussey Didier (husband Francis X. Didier) At time of marriage,Mrs. Louisa McKerring was a widow. She had two children, a daughter, Loretta McKerring (I never met her-I can recall that she lived in MI, at least she was at the time I can remember my Dad mentioning her) A second child was Howard Wolf.

Evidently John Wolf died at an early age. I was born in 1923 and I don't recall ever meeting the man. Laura Roussey was the youngest daughter in this family and her married name was Miller; she was married to Charles Miller. They had one daughter, Laurana. Laura lost her husband, Charles at an early age too. My 1<sup>st</sup> recollection of meeting Laura was at her home in Detroit. I would guess in the early 1930's. Laurana came to Ft. Wayne prior to WWII, and married Richard Golden. Their first home, I believe, was the apartment above the grocery store of my grandfather, Francis X. Didier, this store was on Spy Run Avenue.

**RESTORATION PROJECT:** As stated in last issue of our newsletter, the BHS has taken on the project of restoring numerous grave stones. This project will be done in sections. We have contracted with Scott Brickly, who is familiar with this type of work and has done a number of restorations in other cemeteries. The contractor's "Proposal" reads as follows: 2 new concrete foundations 35'x20'x3' for existing headstones includes labor to move 15 headstones and 2 loads of topsoil. Also, the installation of new foundation and setting stone for Alexis Gerardot and 1 bronze name plate. Total cost is \$6,153.20, due on completion. (this is section #1)

We are asking for your financial support. There are many descendants who have ancestors buried in this sacred place. Let's honor them by continuing this badly needed restoration work. Send your donations to BHS on RENEWAL form included herein.

Thank you! Barbara Gorney, Pres.

Mary Jane Novosel, V.Pres.

Julie Nolan, Sec./Advisory

Gene Yoquelet, Treas.

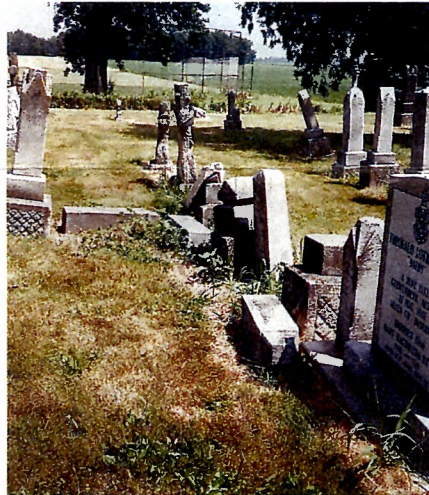
## RESTORATION PROJECT PROGRESS



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



*Yester-Year... .copied and submitted by Jane Morow*

## OBITUARIES

### **LOTHAMER, ELIZA**

Ft. Wayne News & Sentinel, 9/10/1919

Mrs. Eliza Lothamer, aged 74 years, died at 3:15 this morning at the St. Joseph's hospital of complications following an illness of seventeen months. She had been a patient at the hospital for eight weeks.

The deceased was born in DeKalb county, but lived in Allen county most of her life. Her husband died ten years ago. She was a member of the St. Louis Catholic church at Besancon, Ind., and was also a member of the Rosary society of that church.

She is survived by six sons: Joseph, of this city; Andrew, of Coleman, Mich.; John, of Gilman, Ind.; Abner, of Monroeville, Ind.; Albert, of Detroit, Mich., and Rev. Father Jeffe Lothamer, of the St. Peter and Paul church, Huntington, Ind. Two Daughters, Mrs. James Lechler, of this city, and Mrs. J.P. Lomont of Besancon, Ind., two brothers, Rev. Father John Snyder, of Payne, Ohio; two sisters and three half sisters. Twenty-six grandchildren and two great grandchildren also survive.

The remains were removed to the Mungovan parlors to be prepared for burial and will be taken to the home of the daughter, Mrs. P. Lamont, at Besancon, Ind. Funeral services will be held at 8:30 o'clock Friday morning from the home, Besancon, Ind., and at

9 o'clock from The St. Louis church of that place.

### **MRS. SAMUEL BACON DEAD**

Ft. Wayne Sentinel 5/27/1907

Mrs. Josephine M. Bacon, wife of Samuel Bacon, one of the prominent farmers and pioneer citizens of Jefferson township, died Saturday night, May 25, at 9:30 o'clock, at the family residence.

Mrs. Bacon's health had not been good for a long time. Last Sunday a week ago she was stricken and typhoid pneumonia was the result.

Mrs. Bacon was fifty-four years of age and nearly all of that time she has lived in Jefferson township. She was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Didier and was born shortly after the family arrived in America from France. Mr. Didier came to Jefferson township and his wife and children followed. Surviving the union of Mr. and Mrs. Bacon are the following children: Albert S. Bacon, Ephriam J. Bacon, Arthur C. Bacon, Samuel J. Bacon and Mrs. Nicholas Kline. There are five stepchildren. Mrs. Alphonse Harvert, of Ft. Wayne, is a sister of Mrs. Bacon. The funeral of the deceased woman will occur Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock from St. Louis Catholic church, Besancon. The interment will be in the Odd Fellows' cemetery, New Haven. Rev. Father Dhe will officiate.

