



Besançon Historical Society
The Chronicles

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History of Besancon France & Besancon, Indiana
Researched & Written by Michael R. Morow
Presented by Mary Jane Novosel to the Rosary Sodality Feb.23 2019

CONTINUATION OF LAST CHRONICLES ISSUE
Early Days in this Settlement

I turn now to early life here, and Roman Catholic issues, including what I learned from a priest and scholar who did great work regarding your community, the late Father Charles Henry Banet.

The main thing in these families, Father Banet said, "was to follow the priest – the priest's word was law." This is not, however, to say that Catholic moral doctrine was then rigorously followed. The priest's blessing often followed cohabitation, common law or civil marriage, and children. Priests were not always readily available—they served parishes all over Indiana. "So you have a great many lay baptisms, which also reflects infant mortality," Father Banet stressed. These were ordinarily performed by the midwife, an important customary role in most settlements.

Many men of the original settlement group wore distinctly styled beards, growing thickly and long from their chins but with their cheeks shaved. Their wives often still wore the peasant frocks, wide collars and bonnets of eastern France. We have photographs of both, for the camera had been invented at the same time period of this immigration.

Regarding daily life and culture, Father Banet said "people live now like they did then." Except for modern conveniences and common background, the French farm people of Besancon -- and the other rural farmers of Allen County -- are and were, in essence, the same. They assimilated quickly, in other words, in outward behavior.

Father Banet stressed they lived on a very basic sustenance level in early Besancon, still largely wilderness. His ancestors lived in a log cabin. Part of the ground floor was for animals, the cabin built so they would help warm the living quarters both adjoining and above. Many settlers lived in log and mud cabins for a long time. Well toward the end of the 19th century, an old trail called Sugar Ridge ran along the length of Jefferson Township. Game was plentiful, including wild turkeys, geese, ducks, and some deer. Even Squirrels would be eaten, along with occasional large turtles fished out of the Maumee River and cooked in large pots over coals. In early days "winter wolves still howled around their doors at night" and bears were still reported in Zulu in the early 20th century. Early settlers could feed themselves by hunting plentiful deer in the thickly wooded area.

Life was elemental; children were happy on Christmas to get a few pieces of fruit. Newspapers record deadly epidemics that swept the countryside. Then there is the issue of farm accidents, which many of you may well know about even today, but often worse then.

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President's Message ... Barbara Gorney

A review of the beginning of the Besancon Historical Society seemed to be on my wavelength this time. I was surprised to see that I have been president since issue 19 in 2002 and that the Chronicles has been established for 25 years.

The first issue of the Chronicles was in November 1994 and was only four pages. The publication stated that the St. Louis Historical Society was established in 1992. The issue contained an article on the black swamp by Gladys Lomont and a profile of the Henry Castleman Bowers Family by Diana Voors. A chronology was also given on some specific dates about the church. In 1851 Gideon Dickerson donated four acres of land in Jefferson Twp, to Bishop Maurice de St. Palais, Bishop of Vincennes. Construction was begun on a frame church on this land. In 1864 Reverend Louis Grevin became the first resident pastor. In 1870 Reverend August Adam became pastor and began construction of the present church.

The meetings of the historical society began approximately late in 1995. Bill Platter spoke of life of Civil War soldiers and civilians from this area. In March 1996 Marsh Lomont displayed and explained Native American artifacts that were collected around the Besancon area. These meetings were held in the school house.

The second issue of the Chronicles was in May 1996. The officers were Mark Robbins, president; Jim Lomont, treasurer; Al Bower, secretary; and Ralph Violette, editor. In February the Besancon Historical Society and church members celebrated the renovation of the stained glass windows. Father Thomas Lombardi was pastor and announced that the St. Louis district was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Many thanks were given to Phyllis Brockmyer for her effort and advice.

The booklet "Windows of the Past" was compiled by Dianna Voors on the original donors of the windows. The next project that was begun was "Album in the Attic." Old photographs were donated and copied. These are the photos that have been digitalized by the Allen County Library to be added to their website.

In December 1996 Gene Yoquelet was elected president of the historical society. Jim Lomont treasurer and Mike Bowers secretary. The first Besancon Historical Society website was through Indiana University education department of which our editor Ralph Violette was a professor. The website now is through the Allen County Public Library and Roots Web. Adam Barrone has maintained this site.

*Barbara
President Besancon Historical Society*

French was spoken at home and it was not unusual for this to remain so for a generation or two after immigration. When the French would travel "to town," they would change to speaking English.

The French frequented taverns: "They were drinkers," Father Banet said. An early ancestor of his was definitely one, and something of a tyrant to his wife and family. As for having large families, this was just everyday life and their culture. It was not in Banet's view related either to Catholic teaching or the economic necessities of the farm. The French quickly Americanized, like everyone. French were overall a "very small part of the total American immigration picture," he noted, and had no chance of holding out as any sort of cultural enclave.

Claude was "the big name" for men because of Saint Claude of Besancon--a 7th century Benedictine abbot of the Jura and early bishop of Besancon. Trained as a soldier, his name was a rallying cry of the crusades, "for God and Saint Claude." Other first names appear repeatedly in honor of favorite Besancon saints. Virtually every man had Claude in his baptized name, as a second or even a third (unused) name. Other common names included Etienne, and Peter. Many women similarly had Claudia in their name. Also many first names in this old area of France came from the Romans. Very common women's names were Adrienne and Philomene. Like the children of my ancestors, all the Banet children were taught to pray in French.

Besancon & Other Local Settlements

The French immigration from came to all four rural townships here, the center of which is the old monument from 1917 at "Four Presidents' Corner."

Besancon started about 1846 with the founding of the parish by Father Bessonies, who originally said Mass in the home of the pious French immigrant Joseph Dodane. Later, missionary Father Julian Benoit was sent, who regularly visited all the homes. Revered years afterward by the settlers, they painted his likeness in the church sanctuary stain glass window surrounded by angels. The present church was begun by a later priest, Father A. Adam, a political refugee, who arrived in 1870. There were 600 people here and a new church was needed. They then abandoned the name "New France" and adopted Besancon in its place

To finance the new church, costing \$10,000 in its day, Father Adam asked each family to raise a calf to age of three and then turn it over. The families did so, and as the birth of each calf was announced, sales were announced, ultimately netting \$3,000. Timber was furnished by parishioners, mostly white ash. Bricks were burnt a few rods away. The new church was built around the old, the foundation spreading over part of the original cemetery. Many of the very oldest graves noted in church records are not known, and may be under the church.

Simultaneously, the **village of Maples** grew from the early 1850s, eventually including a sawmill engine, lumber working factories, and railroad station. But the village remained small, listing only one merchant even as late as 1880, a general store. Maples was primarily Methodist although some French families bought homes and settled there also.

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The major town here, of course, is **Monroeville**, variously described as a "boom town" or a "thrifty village," platted in 1851 and incorporated in 1860. Fueled by canals and railroads, large factories opened for the manufacture of barrel staves, some of which had branches nearby in Decatur, Indiana and Benton, Ohio. In the late 19th century, Monroeville was the second largest business center in Allen County after Fort Wayne. Old histories talk about its hard-working, conservative business atmosphere, but its rough reputation becomes apparent in old Fort Wayne newspapers. There were seven saloons there at once.

New Haven, settled by Puritans, who came from New England states in 1839, when Henry Burgess laid out the town. Incorporated in 1866. Most early Besancon residents used a New Haven post office, but eventually the **small post of Zulu** opened in 1880. Never incorporated, how did it get such a name? Legend says the name "Four Corners" could not be used because there was already a post office called that in the county. So somebody closed their eyes and stuck a pin in a geography book. It hit a page about Africa.

Conclusion

Saint Louis Church—now 148 years old—

The inscription on one gravestone succinctly states, in a plain declarative sentence, the entire creed and catechism which sustained all the generations, back to the pioneers; *"There is no death."*

The old red brick schoolhouse in the lawn between your church and the new cemetery is a big story yet to be properly researched and told. It is believed that free public education is what finally split the community. The priests insisted on Catholic education; those who favored the schoolhouse became Protestant.

What else happened here?

The traditional system of the family farm and the male first born—by no means peculiar to the French—remained in the new world, a hard necessity for the maintenance of large farms, but with the same old difficult consequences. Within a single generation, its inherent hardship often reasserted itself in large families—with far too many children than could be supported on the farm in the future, even with super-human fathers. Indeed, establishing a "family farm" in the "family name", beyond one generation, was extremely happenstance. For instance, Joseph Reuille held more good farmland than was in his entire ancestral village in France. Yet despite his energy which we have seen, there was certainly no way he could provide his 12 children, much less those 6 additional of his second wife's first marriage. In 1860, fourteen children were in his household, the oldest 17 yrs. and the youngest 2 yrs. Despite the fact that he produced many sons, not one acre of his vast farm would remain in the Reuille name within 50 years of his death.

The fast-moving American economy was radically different from France. Few immigrants understood this. Moved by forces as much commercial as agricultural, America is not a place where land itself is any guaranty to security, no matter how assiduously cultivated. No blame can pass for the fortunes of some, the misfortunes of others. The Civil War greatly accelerated the dizzying commercial thrust of American life, a very damaging change for basic family security and continuity.

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Many left Besancon, no inheritance to look forward to. Fort Wayne was often the first destination, and for awhile a large French neighborhood formed in the Spy Run area. However, well before 1900 many went west, south, or anywhere in these United States, pursuing any livelihood. A large percentage of our historical society members are thus out of town and out of state.

Those who left might keep contact with Besancon relatives for a generation. There would be visits back to Fort Wayne or to "the farm" for the new children of those departed families; similarly, seldom seen cousins, uncles, and aunts might visit the new locales. The early generations of Besancon families had strong patterns of sibling bonding, where brothers and sisters had grown up together in tough circumstances. They would remain best friends for life, however far removed.

Here is a problem we have. Stories of Besancon might be told, but they were sketchy. The old immigrants were not story tellers, they were survivors. Their children were survivors doubly: they had to survive not only the fast-changing pace of American society, but also the hard-bitten life patterns of their immigrant parents, which often offered at best half-solutions for their own lives. Assimilation affected not only those branches of Besancon families who left the land. Those who stayed, within a generation or two, also became similar in almost all respects to any other small town farm settlement in America. French names were Anglicized in pronunciation, if not spelling. French language disappeared from households, as did devotion to French saints. The basic immigration story was either forgotten or more often simplified: one's grandparents simply came from "France" or even "Paris." Too little of the story has been preserved. Nevertheless, a clear shadow of the old immigrant community yet remains in this little area around Saint Louis Besancon Church today.

The oldest living members of this community today likely can remember from their infancy, at best, the last years of the third generation. That is my brothers' case, at age 66.

The late Father Charles Henry Banet, president of Saint Joseph College and a descendant of a pioneer Besancon family, made genealogical study of the Allen County French and the Besancon families his lifetime avocation. His friend Alfred Rondot went door to door in Besancon interviewing many families years ago, but did *not* ask questions concerning customs, superstitions, habits, or culture generally. The work of he and Father Banet stayed at the basic level of genealogy.

Between World War I and World War II, there were 200 families in Jefferson Township including 137 farmers. The ratio remained about the same in the 1990s, and a tradition of religious vocations persisted in some families. After World War II, it could still be said that most French Catholic children of Jefferson Township received a basic Catholic education at Saint Louis Besancon School.

Alfred Rondot concluded his history of his family, the Ternets, with these words, "This closes a chapter on a hard working French farm family who established firm roots in the Besancon community." One can only add that the story is only closed for a time, and only closed because of lack of further time.

The story still to be told is the *whole* story—not just any particular family but all of them, not just family trees but any and all facts and lore that survives, about where each family came from, which families of the group they bonded with in America and why, and what finally became of them here. The immigration of a large group of people from a relatively homogeneous place in the old world, to a particular village in the new world which 150 years later yet reflects many original names, is significant and unique.

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A tracing of all the interfamilial relationships and their bases, over time, their stories and lore, is a worthy project. There is enough work here for at least 3 people to earn Ph.d degrees.

Preservation & a Word from Your Sponsor

I want to talk a little now on why I am here, giving this talk & why my brother wrote this:

The priority is to save the Historical Society archive, and save it right here--a very high priority. If in closing our society, and giving everything to Allen County library, there is absolutely no guarantee that, or any other public library, will 1) preserve photos for long, 2) not scan & destroy all original documents, as most libraries do. There is no substitute for original photos, not just digital copies—as a photographer I could take all day to explain this. But also, these are basically family photos and thus of only 2ndary importance to the public library's concern with genealogy. Allen County would have absolute control once they are out of the hands of the historical society or this parish. I am also a lawyer, and I am telling you the county need not honor *any* stipulations. One day Allen County may well say we don't have room for family pictures from anyone, even if--which is very doubtful--present day enthusiasm for genealogy continues. This is frankly very debatable when it comes to the so-called "millennial" generation.

And there is another issue. *Scientific American* established 15 years ago that all digital media has a *very short life, less than 10 years*. 70% becomes quickly inaccessible to the future. This is not what people expect or believe with current blind faith in technology, but I can personally vouch for it. Ever try to recover pictures from Microsofts' recent photo flagship, Picture It, or documents from Word 4.5? I have—and it is impossible--the hardware those programs depend on no longer works on today's computers.

Giving the precious photo archive to Allen County library brings at least a 50% chance—likely more--they will be destroyed in 10 years, no matter what you are told or believe. Also, local governments are subject to voters and politicians; they change things. Again I speak from personal knowledge; I have represented local government for 37 years. Today's enthusiasm for genealogy may not long survive when the millennials come of age. Unlike Allen County, the city council in Indianapolis is openly hostile to libraries--"nobody reads books anymore." You hear this all the time—the boast of the ignorant and the arrogant. No—preserve your heritage—keep the archive here.

Another reason I am here today: the present Historical Society officers have served for many years and are older than I am. We very badly need new blood—now--and a much closer relation to this parish than we have had. We need some of you to step up—hopefully including some young persons—and get involved to take over and preserve the precious heritage we have been carefully compiling upstairs in the St. Agnes Atrium for 25 years.

Please consider what I have said. Thank you for your attention.

Facebook of Yester year.

BESANCON NEWS Journal Gazette, Jan. 14, 1913

Mr. and Mrs. **Peter Urbine** spent Sunday with **August Chevillot and wife**.

Mr. **Henry Gerardot** was a caller at the **John Ternet** home Saturday.

Mr. **Floyd Ort** was a Fort Wayne caller Saturday.

Louis Fatman is visiting and **Floyd Ort** and family.

Howard Snider called at **William Whitney** home Saturday on business.

Mr. **Charles Whitney** spent Saturday and Sunday in Fort Wayne, the guest of his lady friend.

Charles Loudon and family spent Sunday with **Mr. Richmond and family**.

William Whitney was a New Haven caller Friday.

Stephen Bolyard was a New Haven caller Saturday evening as the interurban cars did not run, so Steve says, he was obliged to walk home, and did not reach home until four o'clock the next morning.

Mr. **Schlup** is engaged in building a fine barn on **William Whitney** farm, when the barn is completed it will be the finest barn in Jefferson township.

Everybody practice running and walking it is getting to be quite a sport around Tillman's and Zulu.

Everybody get your cow bells and dish pans ready. Something doing around the corners.

The Monroeville telephones are all out of commission on account of the heavy sleet. It surely is tough luck for the boys that call their girls by telephone.

Louis Cayot butchered a fine hog last week.

Mr. **Frank Gladioux** is ill with la grippe.

While passing **William Whitney's** farm notice the fine bunch of red porkers in the field.

Thou Ternet purchased **Thou King's** farm last week.

Willie Tatman can run a mile in five minutes now, guess it takes some runner to get ahead of Willie.

BESANCON, Ind., Journal Gazette Sept. 7, 1916

Mr. and Mrs. **John Boitet** and Mr. and Mrs. **Joseph Boitet** motored to New Haven and Fort Wayne Friday on business.

Mr. **Willie and Arthur Ternet**, of Fort Wayne, spent Sunday and Monday with their parents, Mr. and Mrs. **John Ternet**.

The **Dodane family** reunion was held at the home of Mrs. **Mary Dodane** Sunday.

Misses **Erma Giant** and **Dulila Martin** and **Paul Martin** motored to the **Joseph Boitet** home Sunday afternoon.

Mr. and Mrs. **Charles Ternet** and daughter **Velma, Owen Falls and children** spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. **Cletus Ternet**.

Miss **Mabelle Boitet** spent Saturday afternoon at the home of **Louis Roussel**.

Mr. and Mrs. **Peter Malcuit and family** spent Sunday evening with Mr. and Mrs. **John Ternet and family**.

Joseph Boitet and son **Leo** were in Fort Wayne Tuesday.

Mrs. **Cletus Ternet** and Mrs. **Frank Begue** entertained the Besancon Sewing circle at the home of the latter Thursday afternoon. After the business meeting a fine lunch was served to the following: Mrs. **John Ryan**, Mrs. **Joseph Boitet**, Mrs. **Frank Henry, jr.**, Mrs. **Frank Henry, sr.**, Mrs. **Charles Ternet**, Mrs. **John Kennerk**, Mrs. **Mary Pio**, and Miss **Velma Ternet**.

Mr. and Mrs. **Louis Reuille** and daughter **Mercedes**, of Fort Wayne, spent from Saturday evening until Monday afternoon with **Peter Reuille and sons**.

Miss **Mary Ehinger**, who has been employed at the **Sheriff Gladioux** home, of Fort Wayne, for the past six months, returned home Wednesday morning.

Willie Ternet and **Victor Malcuit** were callers at the **Joseph Boitet** home Monday afternoon.

Miss **Ethel Ramsey** spent Sunday afternoon with Miss **Viola Reuille**.

Friends of Besancon.....

Martine Copeland

Martine Copeland who I mentioned in the last issue did visit Fort Wayne and St. Louis Besancon Church. She and her husband live in New York and came on September 11th. Mary Jane, Gene and I were able to greet them at the church. Martine was amazed and delighted with the church and the restoration that was done. The stained glass windows with the names of the families who donated them, originally interested her years ago upon seeing the name, Pepe, which was her ancestor.

As we walked through the old cemetery, she noticed the tombstone with Pio. She said in her research she could not figure this name as being French. I was able to explain that the French name of Pailloz had been shortened to Pio with the same pronunciation. Martine was delighted to see the French names of the families she has researched as she continued around the cemetery.

Martine has been researching French names of Allen Co. from the area around Besancon, France for ten years. She has been in the states for many years and speaks English like a native. She does travel to France to visit and research. Her work has been extensive with each family name. Such as dates for births, marriages, deaths, embarkations, and relationships. Each item is documented for the source. The best part is that all this information has been given to the Allen County Public Library. Visit Allen County Genealogy, Genealogy data base, Allen County Indiana resources, and then French resources. It is in French but can be translated to English. This website has been linked to the Besancon Historical website.

Martine gave a power point lecture at the Allen County Genealogical Society during her visit. She not only spoke of families and their towns, she had statistics on the numbers from each village. Mary Jane and her husband Joe were able to tape this session and it is on a DVD and has been given to the Besancon Historical Society archives.

Barbara Gorney

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

Some French Christmas Traditions—Alpine French School

Advent calendars—les calendriers de l’Avent

French children open Advent Calendars like in many other countries during the month of December leading up to Christmas.

Postcards from Père Noël

Letters from French kids to Father Christmas don’t just disappear into dustbins or drawers in France. Since 1962, France has had a law stipulates any letter to Santa must be responded to in the form of a postcard. The law has no doubt helped boost the myth of Santa Claus among French kids, although it’s doubtful the postmen themselves appreciate all the extra work.

The Nativity Scene

In French this is known as the “**crèche**” and French families who have a nativity scene often really go to town with this and include all kinds of figures not just Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

La Chandeleur

This is the 2nd of February when nativity scenes are displayed until, 40 days after Christmas Day.

Le Réveillon de Noël

Christmas Eve dinner. Around midnight, French families eat a special meal to celebrate the very beginning of Christmas Day.

Père Fouettard

In certain regions of France in the past, Père Fouettard would accompany Père Noël to spank naughty children! Not so common nowadays though surprisingly as social services might not approve!

Shoes by the Fire

In other countries, the tradition varies slightly with stockings and nibbles and drinks for Father Christmas, but French children leave their shoes by the fireplace in the hope that Father Christmas will fill them with presents.

Christmas Dinner

Dishes might include roast turkey with chestnuts or roast goose, oysters, **foie gras**, lobster, venison and cheeses. For dessert, a **chocolate sponge cake log called bûche de Noël** is normally eaten. Another celebration, in some parts of France, is that 13 different desserts are eaten!

La Fêtes des Rois & La Galette des Rois

January 6th, Three Kings’ Day or the Epiphany. French families will buy a “Galette des Rois”, a special tart, & a small porcelain object called a “fève” is hidden inside. The person who gets this in their portion is proclaimed the king (or queen) for the day and wears a pretend crown.

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN.....

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**MEMBERSHIP DUES—PLEASE PAY
BEFORE END OF JANUARY**

Individual---\$15.00

Family-\$20.00 Lifetime-\$200.00

**Send a check Attn: Eugene Yoquelet
Treasurer, Besancon Historical Society**

**616 Highland
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The archives will be open by appointment only

Please Call

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