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Allen County Public Library

Besancon, Indiana Chronicles

Issue No. 8

December 1998

President's Message

What a busy, active year for most of our members! It is hard to believe that the holidays are upon us and thus ends another chapter for the society—a chapter about which I feel very good. I am very proud of our “working bees” and their work in the society. I need not mention names; you know who you are. Our officers have done a great job in their elected offices and in representing the society.

As the 1998 chapter comes to a close, the society can be proud of the many accomplishments of the year: 1) Permanent quarters for the society were established on the second floor of the St. Louis parish office building, which include an office/computer room, photo room and gallery, and the library. These rooms were replastered, painted and decorated. Shelving was installed in the closets, thus creating space for our books/genealogies. Two steel frame lateral filing cabinets were purchased to house the photo collection. 2) The Old Cemetery of St. Louis, Besancon was completed and is now available for sale. (See page 5 of this newsletter.) This is the first book published by the society. A lot of hard work and long hours went into this project. Many thanks to Judy Schroff and Sue Kratzman for doing the research and editing the book, Terri and Barb Gorney for arranging for the publication, and Jim Lomont for doing the grid work in the cemetery. 3) A committee of three was established for the purpose of indexing our library holdings on the same system as the Allen County Public Library. 4) A small contribution was made to the “St. Louis Maintenance Fund” for the restoration of the

exterior of the church. 5) The society voted to withdraw a sum of money from the “Church Window Restoration Fund” to apply towards the painting of the church’s window frames. (The society appreciates contributions to this fund. See page 5 of this newsletter.) And, 6) Society member Joyce Crowl has compiled a directory of the society’s members, which is provided as one of the benefits of membership in the society as a special insert in this issue of the *Chronicles*. (Continued on page 2.)

Membership dues must be paid by January 1, 1999.

To be considered a member in good standing of the society and to continue receiving the *Chronicles*, your dues must be paid by the first of January. Except for lifetime members, all members of the society--no matter when they joined the society--must renew their membership by that date.

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What does 1999 hold for the society? There are some great plans and projects for the coming year. First, we want to complete the indexing of the books/genealogies in our library. Secondly, we want to index and file the photographs. Thirdly, we hope to convert another room on the second floor into a conference/work room. Fourth, we plan to have an open house in the early Spring along with a photo gallery showing. And, fifth, we will finalize plans for a trip to eastern France.

I want to extend to all of you my wishes for a wonderful holiday season. Keep in your hearts the true meaning of Christmas. Thank you Ralph, editor; Barb, vice-president; Theresa, secretary; Carlton, treasurer; Joyce Crowl, membership book; Joan Monnier who is helping me plan the trip to France, and Father Tom Lombardi for completing the original photo project. A big "thank you" to our loyal members who support the society with their dues and donations.

Thank you and Happy Holidays!



**Your President, "Gene" Yoquelet
Besancon Historical Society of Eastern Allen
County**

Meetings of the Society in 1999

Business meetings will take place in January, March, May, July, September and November.

An open house will be held in April.

Special programs will be presented at the February, June, August and December meetings.

There will be no meeting in October.

Additional details will appear in the next issue of the Chronicles.

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The Society maintains a web page at:

<http://www.ipfw.edu/ipfwhist/historgs/besanco.htm>

ANYONE INTERESTED IN HELPING TO PLAN OR IN OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT THE SOCIETY'S TRIP TO FRANCE IN 1999 SHOULD PLAN TO ATTEND SPECIAL MEETINGS AT 9 AM ON 10 FEBRUARY AND 14 APRIL IN THE SOCIETY'S HEADQUARTERS. IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND THESE MEETINGS BUT WOULD LIKE INFORMATION ON THE TRIP, PLEASE CONTACT GENE YOQUELET AT 219-622-4067.

In an earlier issue of the Chronicles we presented an article on the French community in Frenchtown, Pennsylvania. The following is the second article in a series which focuses on French settlements in the United States, which were formed by immigrants from eastern France in the nineteenth century.

Castroville, Texas: A French Alsatian Settlement, 1844 by Joan Jacquay Monnier

On a Spring day in 1998 my daughter Sandra and I crossed the bridge over the Medina River into Castroville, Texas, a small town twenty-three miles from San Antonio on Highway 90.

From the bridge we could see the Spring colors of the trees, some like green gems in the sunlight and others with crimson buds whose leaves were not yet formed. The fast-flowing waters of the Medina River, which originates from springs in the Edwards Plateau of the Hill Country, were crystal clear. The view was especially beautiful, reminiscent of a natural garden.

It was easy to imagine the day in 1844 when Henri Castro led a group of Alsatian immigrants across the river, set up camp and began his settlement. Castroville was an example of a settlement by an empresario. The adventurous Henri Castro, called an "entrepreneur extraordinaire" by one of his biographers, was a native of France born in 1786 to a prominent Jewish family. Henri married Amelia Mathias in 1813. After residing in Castroville nineteen years, Henri died in Monterrey, Mexico in 1865 while on his way to France. Amelia died in 1871 and was buried in the Saint Louis Cemetery in Castroville.¹

Preparations for the Settlement

In 1842 Castro obtained two sizeable land grants in Texas from Samuel Houston, the President of the Republic of Texas. The land was to be used for colonization. Upon returning to Paris, Castro developed an organization for recruiting families and single men willing to settle in Texas. His agents recruited primarily in Alsace and Lorraine and in the states of Germany along the Rhine River. It was the promise of land that attracted so many people to Texas. Contracts were signed, and the colonists began preparations for emigrating.

Sailing to "The Promised Land"

About 27 ships leaving from various European ports brought Castro's colonists to Texas at varying intervals between 1842 and 1847. The

¹In her honor the Castro Garden Club erected "Amelia's Garden," an outdoor reading retreat behind the present Castroville Public Library.

first ship "Le Ebro" sailed from LeHavre on November 2, 1842 with Captain E. Perry and 144 passengers. They arrived at the Port of Galveston two months later on January 1, 1843. The immigrants, however, were still at least 270 miles from their promised land.

Louis Huth, Business Agent for Castro

Louis Huth (1814-1894) of Neufreystädt, Baden learned of Castro's colonization project while in Paris in 1843. Louis and his father Ludwig Huth became involved with Castro's venture. Louis was subsequently appointed to oversee the colony and sailed for Galveston with colonists recruited by Castro on the ship "Jean Key" in October of that year.

At Galveston Huth learned that the colonists who had sailed on earlier ships had not been provided for properly with food and shelter. He helped the colonists and arranged for passage aboard a schooner for those who were willing to go to Port Lavaca, Texas. From there they proceeded overland to San Antonio where they waited for Castro to arrive.

Castro's Arrival

Castro arrived in San Antonio in July 1844. At that time he learned that his land was five miles west of the Medina River, and he hurriedly made a complicated agreement with John McMullen, another recipient of a land grant, for the land to the Medina River. Of this land Castro promised each settler a town lot and forty "out-acres" of land, in addition to the land included in the original contracts, if they would accompany him to claim the land.

On September 1, 1844 Castro set out from San Antonio with 22 ox carts of provisions. Even though Castro had recruited and sent more than 700 colonists to Texas, many, discouraged by delays and by the depletion of their funds, by this point had abandoned the scheme. There were only 27 men colonists, including Louis Huth, some Mexican laborers, a number of mounted armed guards, and two men hired to hunt wild game to feed the settlers who now headed west to the promised land.

Two days later on September 3, 1844 Castro and his colonists, having arrived at the Medina River, crossed to the west side where they built temporary shelters. They surveyed and planned their town, agreed on the name of Castroville, and then they began constructing their homes with the help of Mexican laborers. The cornerstone for the first Catholic church of Saint Louis parish was blessed by Bishop Jean Marie Odin, the first Bishop of Texas, on September 12, 1844, only nine days after the arrival of the colonists.

When Castro returned to France in November 1844, Louis Huth was left in charge of the new colony. During Castro's absence Huth was instructed to supervise the construction of the church and a home for Castro and to assign lots to new colonists as they arrived.

Castro brought his family to Texas in 1846. He relieved Huth of his duties and placed Theodore Gentelz in charge of the colony.

Continued in the next issue of the Chronicles

Membership/Ordering Information (please print)

Name: _____

Street or Box No.: _____

City: _____ State: ___ Zip: _____

Telephone No.: () _____ E-mail: _____

Membership. Please check one of the following:

Renewal (due 1 January)

New Membership

Check one of the following categories and enter the amount on the line in the next column.

Individual Membership (\$10.00 per year)

Family membership (\$15.00 per year)

Life-time membership (\$100.00)

I would like to send a gift membership to the person named below. (Enter the name and address of the person in the space below and enter \$10.000 on the line in the next column.)

I would like to make an additional donation to the Besancon Historical Society in the amount of..... (Enter amount in the next column.)

I would like to make a contribution to the Church Window Restoration Fund. (Enter amount in the next column.)

I would like to order the following. Place the number desired in the left-hand column and place the amount of the purchase in column next to the item.

	Photo of interior of St. Louis Church (\$5.00)	
	Photo of exterior of St. Louis Church (\$5.00)	
	Old Cemetery of St. Louis Besancon (\$19.95)	
Total. Add purchases and place amount in the next column.		
Indiana residents: add 5% sales tax to total		
If you have purchased the Old Cemetery book, add \$3.50 shipping & handling		
Add total, sales tax, and shipping & handling and place the amount in the extreme right column.		

Add all items in right-hand column and remit check in that amount along with this form to: Besancon Historical Society, 15535 Lincoln Highway East, New Haven IN 46774

