


• Local History 101: Making Life-changing Decisions in the Kankakee River Valley
 • Episode 3: Community Transformations Overseen By George R. Letourneau (1860-1906)
 • Presenter: Dr. James Paul
 • KCC Lifelong Learning Institute

Episode 3 Overview
 1. Decisions before 1860
 2. Decisions 1860-1906
 3. Interaction with George Letourneau

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 For Members, Resources, Local History Series, Transformations Letourneau Narrative.



George Letourneau (1831-1906) and his home in Bourbonnais as depicted in the 1883 *Atlas of Kankakee County*.

1. Hello, my name is Dr. Jim Paul. All you need right now is pen and paper. Please put your phones on “silent mode”. This session will be recorded. The complete “Transformations Letourneau Narrative” with slides will be posted on the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society website under Members/Resources/Local History Series. Please use this link <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/resources>. In the first two parts to this course, you will answer questions as a friend of George Letourneau (1831-1906). You will make life-changing decisions before 1860 in part 1 and then make life-changing decisions from 1860-1906 in part 2. In part 3, you will interact with George Letourneau who is deceased but somehow able to communicate with you.

This course is the third in a series of courses entitled **Local History 101: Making Life Changing Decisions in the Kankakee River Valley**. The first course was entitled *Potawatomi Peril (to 1838)*. The second course was entitled *Antebellum Abolitionists (1838-60)*. Episode 4 is in the planning stage. It will be the Durham-Perry Family Legacy in the Kankakee River Valley (1906-61). These courses will immerse course participants in the gut wrenching decisions of the individuals who lived in the Kankakee River Valley. The purpose of these course programs will be to engage the audience in a new way. The goal is not to have two levels of learning in the traditional two planes of narrator-audience, teacher-student, and presenter-audience, but to achieve one level in which all parties immerse themselves in the past. For example, during this course program, you will walk in the shoes of Kankakee River Valley residents, and I will become George Letourneau. You will not only be compelled to make life-changing decisions from the 1840s to 1906 at the same time he made those decisions, but also interact and ask Letourneau questions.

For parts 1 and 2 of this course, you will assume the identity of a French-Canadian person who was a contemporary and friend of George Letourneau (1831-1906). You were born in Quebec Province, Canada just like he was. Please pick a number from one to ten. [Pause until the number is picked. Continue after everyone has picked her/his number.] The number you picked represents your occupation next to the number below.

1. Farmer
2. Shop Keeper
3. Horse Breeder
4. Political Official
5. Roman Catholic Clergy—Nun or Priest
6. County Law Enforcement Official
7. Teacher
8. Home Worker
9. Hired Laborer
10. Banker

**Please choose a name for yourself as a person living from the 1830s to 1906.*

2. In this course program, you will assume the identity of a person who was a contemporary of George Letourneau (1831-1906). Please pick a number from one to ten. [Pause until the number is picked. Continue after everyone has picked her/his number.] The number you picked represents the person next to the number. **Please pick a name for yourself.**

Life changing decisions

With your new identity, you will now be compelled to make important life-changing decisions about the direction of your life and community from the 1840s to 1906. You will be prompted by George Letourneau to make your decision at the same time he had to make his decision. You must record each decision.

3. No additional narrative for this slide.



Part 1

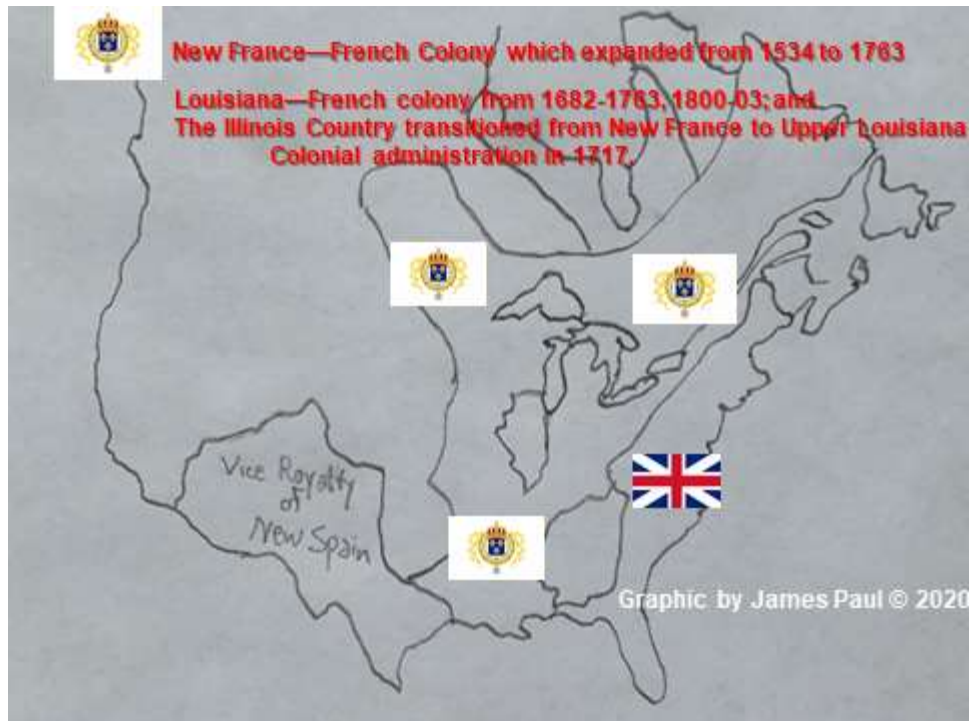
4. *Bonjour madames, mademoiselles, et monseurs, mon amis! C'est bon etre ici. Comment allez vous? Tres bien! Je m'apelle George Richard Letourneau, Francais-Canadien et Quebecois. Aussi, je suis le premier maire de Bourbonnais en mille huit cent soixante-quinze (1875). I will now speak in my new language, English, which I learned as a teenager in Chicago while working as a grocery and a bookstore clerk in 1847 at the age of sixteen.*

I was born in St. Thomas, in the province of Quebec on March 1, 1831, to Joseph (1793-1862) and Marguerite Lemieux-Letourneau (1798-1852). St. Thomas is located about 30 miles northeast of Montreal. I had three step brothers (Jacques, Joseph, and Henry) and one step sister (Marguerite) from my mother's previous marriage to Philip Couillard. After Mr. Couillard died, my mother married my father. The little village of St. Thomas is located just northeast of Montreal, north of the St. Laurence River and southwest of Quebec City. There were 930 inhabitants of St. Thomas in 1839. However, due to ethnic and religious problems in St. Thomas in the year 1838, my family moved to Henryville, Quebec Province (about 30 miles southeast of Montreal) and I was enrolled in the parish school at St. George. I will tell you more about the reasons for our move in a moment. You see the first most important decision in my life that I had to make at age 16. Please wait, and we will address this decision in a few minutes.

My ancestor, David Letourneau, came to the Quebec area in 1658 at age 42. He was from Muron in western France, just northeast of Rochefort. Note also Bourbonnais province to the east.




5. My ancestor David Letourneau (1616-70), a merchant and miller, came to Quebec Province from Muron (located 10 miles northeast of Rochefort), France in 1658, at the age of 42, with his two sons during the reign of King Louis XIV (1638-1715). Just to note, the province of Bourbonnais is toward the east in central France. David Letourneau may have left war prone France with a sense of adventure, New World liberty, and opportunity for success in a new land. David left behind his wife, daughter, and two infants. For three years, the threesome worked as farm laborers. In 1661, David built a home on the Isle de Orleans, just east of Quebec City on the St. Lawrence River. In 1665, David's wife Jeanne and their two children joined him in Quebec.



6. Quebec Province had once been an integral part of New France which was established during French exploration in the year 1608 (Quebec City founded). In 1717, the French crown detached the Illinois country from the Canadian part of New France and placed the area under the Louisiana colony’s jurisdiction. Louisiana, named after King Louis XIV, remained under French control from 1682-1763 and 1800-03. Napoleon Bonaparte (1799-1815) decided to sell Louisiana to the United States in 1803.

We French-Canadians were very familiar with the explorations of Rene-Robert Cavelier Sieur de la Salle (1643-87). La Salle had a quest to explore the rivers of New France that flowed into the Mississippi. In 1679, he and thirty-three men made a portage from the St. Joseph River to a marshy river’s headwaters. The party continued paddling into the “Great West” with eight canoes and eventually completed the journey from Montreal to the mouth of the Mississippi. La Salle named the river between the St. Joseph and Illinois Rivers the Seignelay in honor of colonial minister of France. The name was later changed to the Theakiki and is now called the Kankakee (Johnson-*Bourbonnais*, 9). The Potawatomi called the land adjacent to the river “Te-yar-ac-ke” (“wonderful land”). The word “Ky-an-ke-ke” evolved. Some Indian tribes called the land “Te-ok-e-kee” (“wolf”) while some *coureurs de bois* used the name “Quin-que-que” (Richard, 1).

In the 1700s the French changed Native American culture forever by introducing Indian lands to trade goods from the north and east (by way of Mackinac and Detroit). The French were mainly "Voyageurs" seeking pelts for Europe's markets and the Indians wanted clothing, pots & other metal objects, guns, powder, etc



These graphics are at Isle a la Cache.

What were the going rates for goods?

With 1 pelt to trade, choose from:

10 earrings	30 musket balls
25 needles	1 silver cross

With 2 pelts to trade, choose from:


1 cotton shirt	
1 axe	
2 yards of cloth	

With 3 pelts to trade, choose from:

1 small blanket	1 silver armband
1 tin kettle	10 strands of glass beads
3 gallons of rum	

Other types of fur had value too:

1 beaver pelt = 10 muskrat pelts or 2 deer pelts or 2 skunk pelts
2 beaver pelts = 1 otter pelt or 1 bear pelt



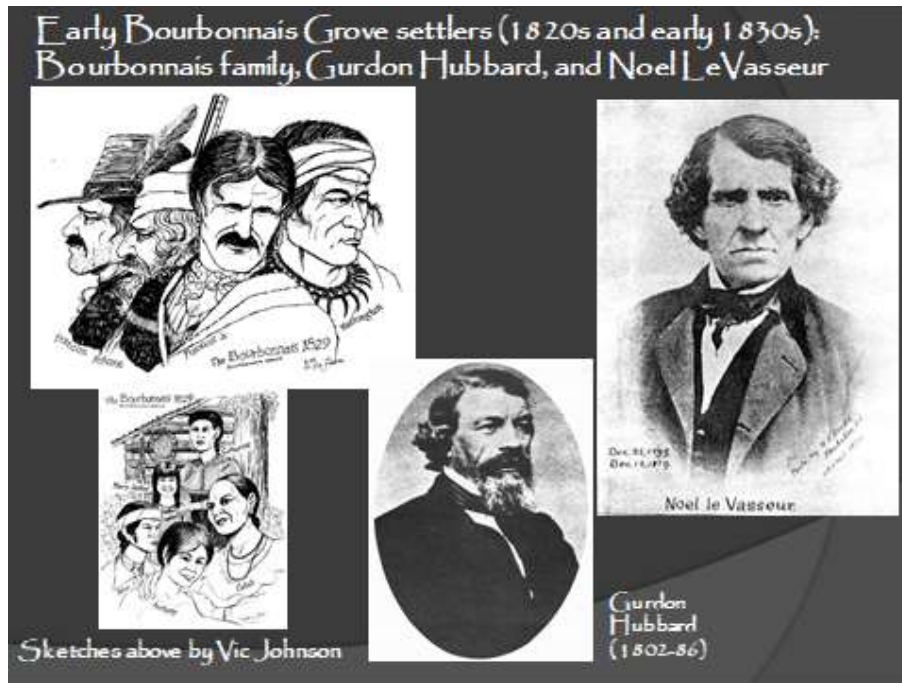
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8. In 1763, as a result of the Treaty of Paris which ended the Great War for Empire between France and Britain, Quebec became part of British Canada. In 1774, Quebec Province stretched south of the Great Lakes to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The Quebec Act of 1774 restored the civil rights of the French population of British Canada and expanded the boundaries of Quebec Province to include all of what in 1783 became known as the Northwest Territory of the new United States (Johnson-Bourbonnais, 11).

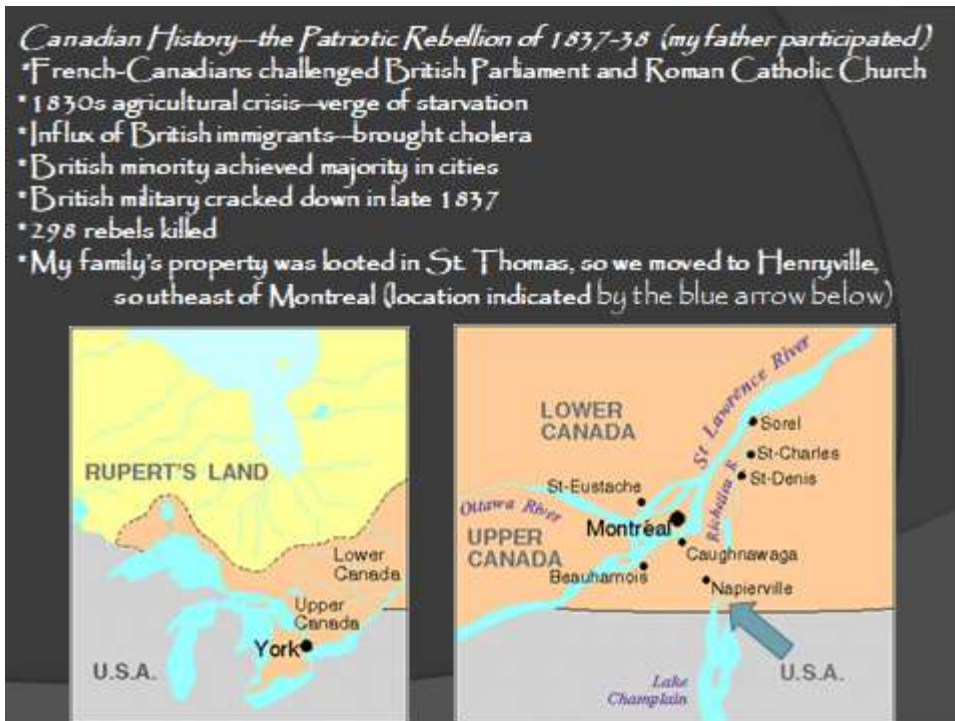


9. Another Treaty of Paris in 1783, after the American Revolution, ended British control of the area from the Alleghany Mountains to the Mississippi as the new United States of America moved its borders west. Even though British Canada repulsed a U.S. invasion of Lower Canada during the War of 1812 and the White House was burned, Great Britain lost the war.

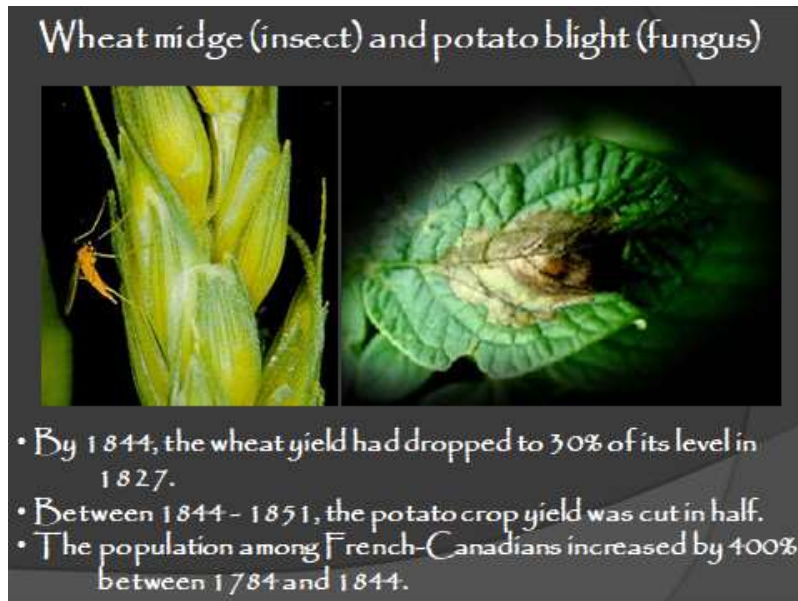


10. By 1817, the American Fur Company (headquartered in Astor, New York with a recruiting station in Montreal) employed nineteen-year-old Quebecois Noel LeVasseur (1799-1879)—along with friends Dominique Bray and Henri Boucher, and fifteen-year-old Makinaweon Gurdon Hubbard (1802-86). LeVasseur and Hubbard were both involved in purchasing native lands and opening the Chicago to Danville Road through the Grand Prairie along the Kankakee River (now Route 102), and the Hubbard Trail which Illinois highway 1 now follows. By the late 1820s and early 1830s, other French-Canadians joined Noel LeVasseur in the settlement along the Kankakee. One of the brothers Francois Bourbonnais, Sr. and Antoine Bourbonnais is credited with the name of the new settlement “Bourbonnais.” Their Canadian immigrant ancestor Francois Brunet had changed his name in the late 1600s to “Le Bourbonnais”, after the province of his hometown Bourges. A 12 mile long by 1 mile wide settlement along the Kankakee River soon became known as Bourbonnais Grove. The “Bourbonnais” name may have been used as early as 1823 when Antoine Bourbonnais worked in the area as an employee of the American Fur Company. The “Grove” refers to the unbroken line of timber along the northeast bank of the Kankakee River up to a mile wide and extending from today’s Cobb Park in Kankakee to Davis Creek, 2 miles north of Bourbonnais Grove.

Up until the 1830s, this land was inhabited by the Potawatomi. They prized the area around the Kankakee River, and were most reluctant to leave this prosperous land for the plains of western Iowa. After the Treaty of Camp Tippecanoe which ended the Black Hawk War of 1832, the Potawatomi began to cede their lands along the Kankakee River to land speculators including LeVasseur and Hubbard. The tribes moved west of the Mississippi.

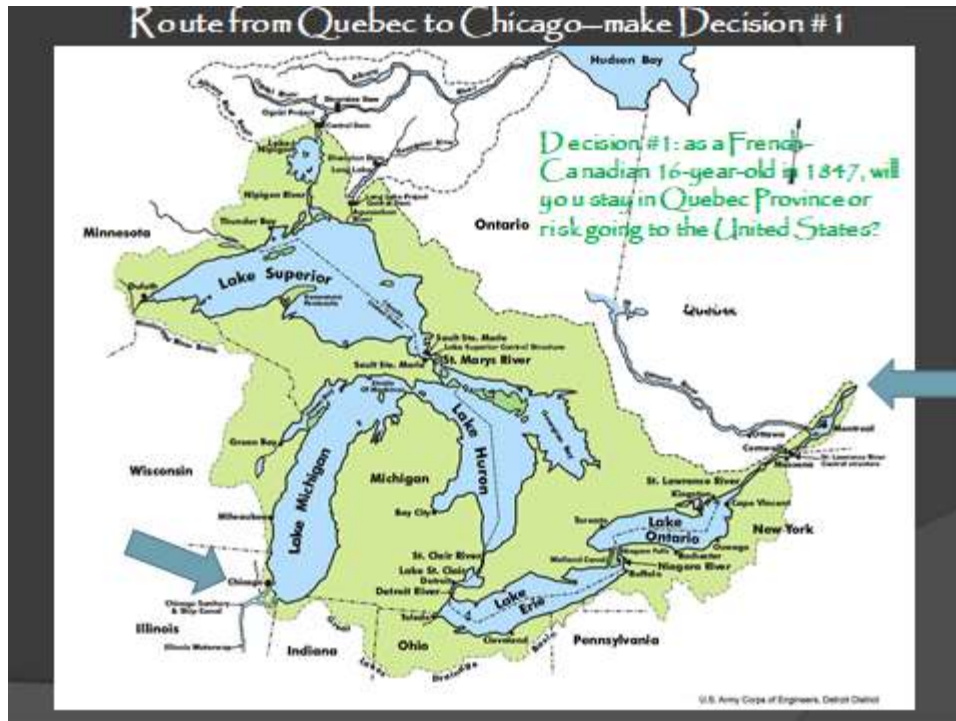


11. Now, back to my childhood in Quebec Province. My father Joseph was a merchant who participated in the Patriotic Rebellion of 1837-38, causing our property in St. Thomas to be ransacked and looted by the British volunteers. I was only six and seven years old at the time of this crisis, but I remember the political and agricultural problems. After the attack on our property in St. Thomas, my family moved to Henryville, southeast of Montreal. There, I attended St. George parish school where I met a girl three years younger than myself: Elodie Langlois (1834-87), daughter of Isaac and Marguerite (Cyre) Langlois. She was born in St. John's, Quebec Province in 1834. We fell in love, and exchanged vows of loyalty before I departed for Chicago in 1847, and she gave me a lock of her hair. Her family would immigrate to Bourbonnais Grove in 1848, about the same time as my arrival. Elodie and I would be married in Bourbonnais Grove in 1852.



12. In addition to the ill feelings from the failed rebellion, we French-Canadians faced a new crisis: the wheat midge and potato blight. Although Quebec Province is large, the amount of arable land was limited. We Quebecois were farmers by nature. Our Roman Catholic Church had encouraged us to perceive the economic future of Canada to be based on agriculture. Conversely, the British immigrants were more entrepreneurial. French-Canadians had large families to work the land. This increased population caused an unexpected side effect: most children in a given family had to look outside his/her native parish for new land to farm (King, 1). But arable land was running out in Quebec Province. The wheat and potato crops may have continued to feed a growing population for another generation had not the wheat midge appeared in the early 1830s.

Crop damage occurred during the larval stage of the midge insect. The midge larvae, after hatching, feed on the developing wheat kernel, causing it to shrivel, crack and become deformed. As there are no visible, external changes in color, size or shape of the affected wheat head, the damage to the crop is not readily apparent. By 1844, the wheat yield had dropped to 30% of its level in 1827. With the decrease in wheat yield, the farmers of Quebec increased production of the potato. The potato blight made its appearance in Canada around 1844, causing a disastrous decline in the potato crop. From 1844 to 1851 the potato crop yield was cut in half (King, 5). While the wheat and potato crops decreased dramatically, the population among French-Canadians increased by 400% between 1784 and 1844. More expensive arable lands were available in the English-speaking eastern part of Quebec Province, but the French-Canadians were reluctant to make this move for economic and cultural reasons. Something had to give (King, 5). Migrating to work in New England cotton mills was one option, but the more alluring option for French-Canadians like myself was the open prairie promoted by LeVasseur as the Mecca of the west: Bourbonnais Grove.



13. The lands of the American Midwest were very familiar to us French-Canadians. French explorers had opened up the interior of the continent in the 17th and 18th centuries. Louis Joliet (1645-1700) and Fr. Jacques Marquette (1637-75) had used the Chicago portage in 1673 in their exploration. Chicago would become the great metropolis of the American Midwest because it provided a shortcut from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi. By 1779, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable (1745-1818) had built a trading post on the Chicago River. In 1803, the American controlled Fort Dearborn became the nucleus of the future city. In a Chicago election of 1826, twenty-one of thirty-five registered voters were French-Canadian. We could emigrate from Quebec Province via the Great Lakes to Chicago. I knew that the travel time by steamship down the Great Lakes from the St. Lawrence River to Chicago would take about five weeks.

Now it is time for you to make your Decision #1: **Decision #1: as a French-Canadian 16-year-old in 1847, will you stay in Quebec Province or risk going to the United States?**

When I came to Chicago in 1847 at the age of sixteen, the population was about 20,000. In a previous Chicago election of 1826, 21 of 35 registered voters were French-Canadian. The Chicago population had risen from 100 in 1830, to 4,470 in 1840, and to 29,963 in 1850. While in Chicago, I worked as a grocery and bookstore clerk. But my real goal was 56 miles south: Bourbonnais Grove.

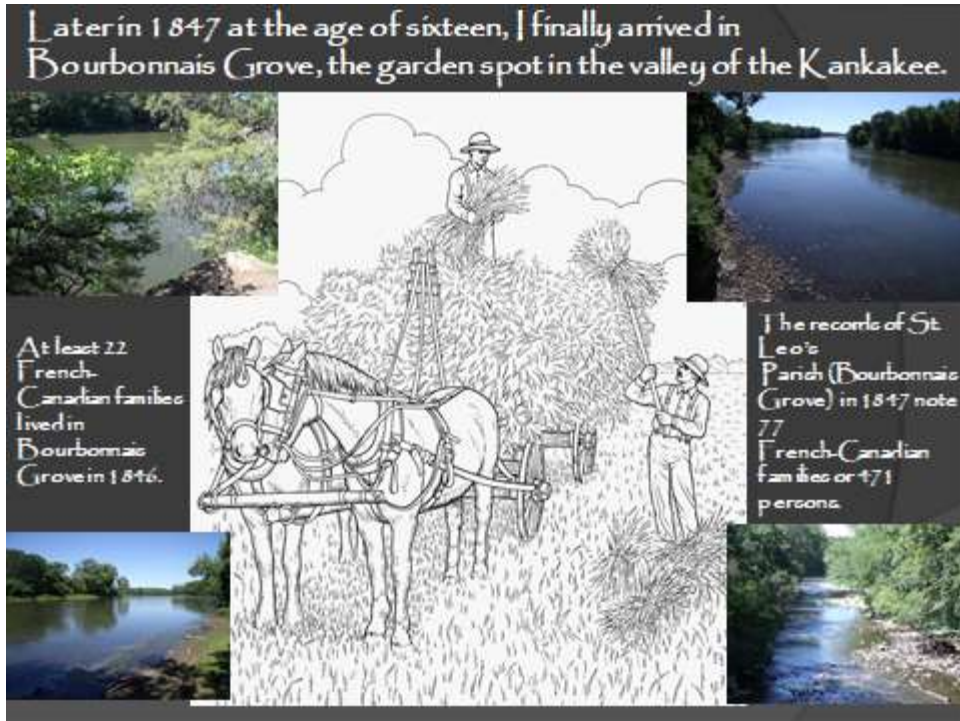


John Deere
invented the cast
steel plow in 1837.

14. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the Great Lakes were open to navigation to the east. Agricultural products could be transported from areas surrounding the Great Lakes to eastern markets. Chicago grew in population from 100 individuals in 1830 to 4,470 in 1840 and 29,963 in 1850 (King, 5). However, we French-Canadians viewed Bourbonnais Grove, 56 miles to the south, as far more important than Chicago. As a city, Chicago was considered a stopover point on the route to Bourbonnais Grove. When Illinois became a state in 1818 and up until the end of the nineteenth-century, Bourbonnais was so well known in Canada that many French-Canadians asked “Is Illinois in Bourbonnais?” (Johnson-Bourbonnais, 7).

John Deere’s invention of the cast steel plow in 1837 revolutionized the turning over of the prairie. All of these factors prompted me to leave home at the age of sixteen in 1847 for a new opportunity and adventure in the fertile lands of Bourbonnais Grove.

When I arrived in Chicago at the age of sixteen in 1847, I worked as a grocery clerk and then in a bookstore. I also learned how to speak English. The population of Chicago at that time was about 20,000. The *Chicago Tribune* began publishing in 1847 and the Chicago to Galena Railroad was completed in 1848.

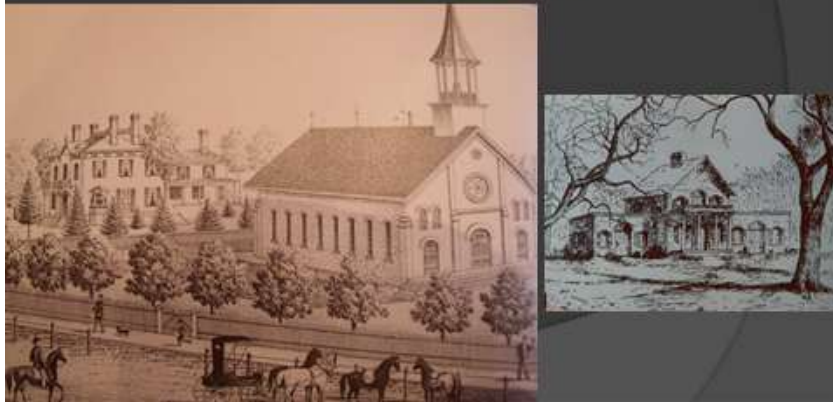


15. In that same year 1847, at the age of sixteen, I came to Bourbonnais Grove with John Letourneau, Captain Fortin, Alexander Boucher, and Godfrey Mathieu to investigate and report on conditions for the Province of Quebec. Godfrey and I stayed in Bourbonnais Grove, while the rest of the group went back to Canada to report on the opportunities and advantages of Bourbonnais Grove's rich prairie and timberland (Burroughs, 102). What a garden spot in the great west for the French-Canadian small farmer!

For the first few years in Bourbonnais Grove, I worked for Mr. Osborn as a clerk. I was so happy when Elodie's family arrived in 1848. They located on a farm near the Bourbonnais Grove settlement and prospered. At least 22 French-Canadian families lived in Bourbonnais Grove by 1846. Many of Noel LeVasseur's recent recruits settled on the Francis LeVia reservation west of Davis Creek along the Kankakee forming "Petite Canada". The families that lived in Petite Canada, often farmed the prairie in the Mesheketeno Reserve up to a few miles away from their homes. The LaVia Reserve had some farmland, but also many acres of timber and river frontage. The Mesheketeno Reserve was almost all prairie.

The main settlement of Bourbonnais Grove was known as LaPointe until 1838, centering on Bourbonnais Creek (Johnson, 27). Along with LeVasseur, new family names like Marcotte, Rivard, Flageole, Bray, Badin, and Boucher had arrived in the onetime trading post (King, 5). By 1849, sixty families (mostly from Quebec) had settled in Bourbonnais. More Quebecois came between 1851 and 54 (Johnson-*Bourbonnais*, 37). One sad side effect of the immigration was that a cholera epidemic arrived with the new settlers in the spring of 1849, killing 53 people by August of that year.

The Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church is featured in the drawing at left—from the 1883 *Historical Atlas of Kankakee County*. The two-story Italianate style rectory (on far left) was built in 1870 [and demolished in 1952]. The sketch at right, by Austin Conrad Shreffler, depicts the Early Classic Revival brick home of Noel LeVasseur which Thomas Durham built in 1837.



16. The site of first mass in Bourbonnais Grove was in Noel LeVasseur's home in June 1837. When I came to Bourbonnais Grove, I learned that St. Leo's Chapel was built in 1841. At that time, the missionary priest, Fr. Hypolite Du Pontavice of the Vincennes Diocese and pastor of Joliet since 1839, greeted French-Canadian Roman Catholics to the new 20 x 30 foot log chapel. The chapel was built on a half-acre of land purchased from Noel LeVasseur for \$20—the site of the present day rectory. From 1841-46, Fathers Du Pontavice, Dunn, Crevier, and St. Palais served the mission chapel. At least 22 French-Canadian families lived in Bourbonnais Grove in 1846. The records of St. Leo's Parish in 1847 noted 77 French-Canadian families or 471 persons.

In May 1847, Fr. Tausaint Courjeault arrived in Bourbonnais Grove to oversee the building of a new church and establish a new parish. In 1849, the new frame church was completed and dedicated by Bishop Van de Velde of Chicago on June 2, 1849. The church was renamed for the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the frame church burned to the ground in 1853 (during the pastoral leadership of Fr. Charles Chiniquy), a new church of native limestone was designed by Pastor Fr. Isadore Antioine Lebel. Parishioners completed the construction in 1858. The stone was hauled in horse-drawn wagons from quarries near the Kankakee River. This is the first church of the Clerics of St. Viator in the U.S. (September 10, 1865), first mission of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame (summer of 1860), first U.S. residence of the Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary (fall of 1889), and the oldest church in Kankakee County (and one of the oldest in northeastern Illinois). A large bell was installed and dedicated in the belfry of the church in 1867—the same bell still today tolls at church service times. [The century old stained glass windows on the south side of the church were blown out by the 1963 tornado.]



17. Decision #2: At the age of 19, would you travel 2000 miles to seek your fortune in the California gold rush?

In March 1850, the California gold rush fever stuck me and many others in Bourbonnais. Over the course of several months, twelve of us from Bourbonnais Grove and Momence (John Worrel, Alex Burchim, Moise Legris, Sr., Eloi Marcotte, Alexander Testu, and others from Bourbonnais and Capt. Phil Worchester, Cord Parish, John Beebe, Allen Thatcher, Hi Beedle and others from Momence) crossed the planes to California by way of Council Bluffs and Salt Lake City. We were filled with “dreams of golden nuggets, and fortunes made with little labor” (Kenaga and Letourneau, 1046). We had a “willingness to penetrate the vastness of the intervening wilderness” (1046).

We purchased horses and complete equipment before setting out. We “drove oxen from Salt Lake, toiled along dusty roads, crossed deserts, suffered thirst through the long stretches of sage-covered plains, guarded the camp by night, repulsed attacks by savage marauders, forded swollen streams, climbed the ascent of the Rocky Mountains and wandered along the precipices of the Sierra Nevada” (1046).

Once we arrived in the gold field area, I turned my attention to quartz mining and its chief accompaniment: freighting. With teams of horses, I sold an assortment of provisions to the prospectors from pick axes to pickels. I “delivered provisions and equipment to the camps, and it is in this connection that one of the most interesting incidences in [my] life transpired” (1046). Keep in mind that the mining area was lawless, unprotected by organized law. “The man who read Greek was no better in the eyes of the community than the man who couldn’t read or write his

mother tongue. Opportunities for great heroism and self-sacrifice went hand in hand with opportunities for the worst crimes in the calendar” (1046).

Fortunately, I contributed to the former. In September 1851, I “went to deliver a load of flour to a man who kept a store in a tent in a new mining camp called Chasty, 250 miles up the river from Sacramento City, up in the mountains, a place of profound desolation, and with no house in sight. As [I] slept in [my] wagon, near [my] four-horse team, [I] was startled in the night by a cry of a man in distress, which cry [I] answered, and at once jumped from [my] wagon to follow the direction from whence the cry came. [I] soon after encountered two men coming rapidly towards [me], one of whom had been shot in the neck with an Indian arrow. Both were French-Canadians, and the wounded man was named Flavian Nadeau, brother of Dr. Nadeau, a practicing physician of Kankakee for many years, and now a native of Los Angeles, California. The Indians in pursuit of the young men were few in number, and [I], who had a couple of six-shooters, blazed away in their direction, to frighten them, and to arouse the other miners. This strategy proved effective, for after running to [my] wagon, to use it as a breastworks, [we] found [ourselves] unmolested, and were able to attend to the wound in the neck of the young Canadian.

Daylight disclosed a badly swollen and inflamed surface, and it was evident that in pulling out the arrow a piece had been left in the flesh. [I] washed and bound the wound in strips of his own shirt as well as the circumstances permitted, and as soon as possible started with the young man in the wagon for Sacramento, where he might receive proper medical attention. The journey of two hundred and fifty miles was accomplished in five days, and in the meantime the wound was kept clean, although it seemed hardly possible that the patient could survive the jaunt. At times, however, he was able to walk slowly beside the wagon, and upon arriving in Sacramento, [I] put up [my] teams and took him to a surgeon, who probed the wound and removed the piece of arrow. Having much to attend to, [I] left [my] patient at the end of the day, and at dawn of the following day was again upon [my] way, little expecting ever to hear of either incident or man again.

In 1894, while in Concordia, Kansas, whither [I] went to attend the funeral of [my] daughter [Eugenie], the wife of Dr. F.L. Marcotte, [I] again met Nadeau, through the kindly offices of Samuel C. Demars, who formerly had lived in Kankakee, and clerked in the dry goods store of Fred Swannell, and who, with Dr. Marcotte and Mr. Joseph St. Louis, of Kankakee, both [my] sons-in-law, called on Mr. Nadeau. All of the gentlemen present heard the narrative retold by a man in whose heart burned the fires of gratitude. . .” 1046-47).



18. I did fairly well in California. With my Bourbonnais Grove friends, we had one of the richest quartz mines in the state of California, or possibly in the world. After two years in California, we finally sold out and left San Francisco via steamship by way of Panama touching at Aspinwall (Panama port city) and Havana, then to New Orleans, and up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, then up the Illinois River and the Illinois-Michigan Canal to Joliet, arriving back in Bourbonnais Grove on July 5, 1852 (1047).

Elodie was waiting for me, and on August 12, 1852 we were married by missionary pastor Father B. Wieg at the new white frame 110' x 50' church which had replaced St. Leo's Chapel in 1849 (cornerstone laid on February 15, 1849). The new timber church had been dedicated "on June 2, 1849, and renamed for the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Elodie was eighteen and I was twenty-one when we were married. This church would burn to the ground in 1853 with the Reverend Charles Chiniquy [1809-99] as the primary suspect" (*Maternity*, 9).

We had eleven children, 5 boys and 6 girls:
 *George A.—born May 26, 1853,
 *Elodie ‘Elizabeth’—born July 21, 1854,
 *Beatrice ‘Agnes’—born July 31, 1856,
 *Eugenie—born April 7, 1858,
 *Phillip—born April 21, 1860,
 *Robert—born February 8, 1862,
 *Arthur—born January 20, 1864,
 *Marie ‘Eva’—born July 14, 1866,
 *Georgina ‘Louise’—born August 1, 1869,
 *Joseph ‘Oswold’—born January 31, 1871, and
 *Marie ‘Corrine’—born August 15, 1872.
 *A grandson also lived with us after our daughter-in-law
 Lucy (daughter of Noel LeVasseur, wife of
 George A.) died of consumption in 1876:
 Albert—born June 29, 1874.

19. We had eleven children; George A.—born May 26, 1853, Elodie ‘Elizabeth’—born July 21, 1854, Beatrice ‘Agnes’—born July 31, 1856, Eugenie—born April 7, 1858, Phillip—born April 21, 1860, Robert—born February 8, 1862, Arthur—born January 20, 1864, Marie ‘Eva’—born July 14, 1866, Georgina ‘Louise’—born August 1, 1869, Joseph ‘Oswold’—born January 31, 1871, and Marie ‘Corrine’—born August 15, 1872. We also had one grandson live with us after our daughter-in-law Lucy (daughter of Noel LeVasseur) died of consumption in 1876: Albert—born June 29, 1874. All of our children and grandson were present at Elodie’s deathbed on January 19, 1887. I outlived two of my daughters and my grandson Albert. Eugenie died in Concordia, Kansas in February 1894, ‘Louise’ died in Kankakee in March 1896, and Albert died in Kankakee in February 1900.



20. Soon after getting married, I engaged in general merchandising with Alexander Testu in Bourbonnais Grove for a couple of years. I had known Alexander since our California mining days. In 1855, I sold my interest in the business to Alexander so that I could devote more time to farming on the farmstead that I had just recently purchased. My mother, Marguerite, died at the age of 54 in Henryville, Quebec Province in 1852. I learned of her death in a November 10, 1852 letter from my father. As part of our honeymoon trip, Elodie and I travelled to Henryville in September of that year to see her one last time. Three years later, my father came to live with my family on the new farmstead in Bourbonnais Grove. He died in our home at the age of 69 in April 1862.

Here are some of the French songs and lullabies that we sang in the parlor and babies' bedrooms of our new home after 1854:

"**Alouette**, gentille Alouette" (Skylark, nice skylark) "Alouette, je te plumerai" (Skylark, I shall pluck you), "Je te plumerai "la tête" (I shall pluck "your head"), "Je te plumerai "la tête" (I shall pluck "your head"), "Et "la tête" (And "your head"), Et "la tête" (And "your head"), "Alouette" (Skylark), "Alouette" (Skylark), "O-o-o-oh" [This was a canoe "keeping beat to the oars" voyageur song that originated in Montreal. It was written down in the 1870s].

"**Frère Jacques**", Frère Jacques, Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous? Sonnez les matines! Sonnez les matines! Din, dan, don. Din, dan, don. [Brother Jacob, Brother Jacob, Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping? Morning bells are ringing! Mornings bells are ringing! Ding, dang, dong. Ding, dang, dong.

"**Sur le Pont d'Avignon**" "L'on y danse, l'on y danse", "Sur le pont d'Avignon", "L'on y danse tout en rond", [On the bridge of Avignon, We all dance there, we all dance there, On the bridge of Avignon, We all dance there in a ring.




21. The home that I purchased in 1854 on North Main Street in Bourbonnais Grove had been built on foundations that were around for about eighteen or twenty years, if not longer. At the time of purchase, I remember saying “When [I] purchased the building in 1854, [I] remarked that [I] bought a ‘pioneer structure’—to be used as a farmhouse—and three acres of land from a Chicagoan Jacob Russell.” [I] stated further: “To reach Momence one traveled southeast [from Rockville, near Rock Creek], leaving to the right Bourbonnais, which then was quite a settlement, having a post office kept by Jacob Russell . . .” (Letourneau Home Museum brochure, 4). Russell was not a postmaster, but he was the receiver for the Port of Chicago, and an uncle of Noel LeVasseur’s second wife Ruth Russell Bull. Russell had purchased the property from Noel LeVasseur in 1848. However, the farmhouse had served as a post office and general store in 1840. Another Russell, whose first name was Samuel (perhaps Jacob’s brother), was the 1837-40 postmaster of Bullbonus Grove—“Bullbonus” was a corrupted or vernacular rendering of the French name “Bourbonnais” which was used to name the village “Bourbonnais Grove”. Samuel Russell occupied the post office (with house attached) which was owned by his brother Jacob. Accordingly, the original date of occupation for the house can be set at 1837 or earlier.

I believe that the site was occupied long before 1837, perhaps by the original Francois Bourbonnais, Sr. family in 1829-32 or some early trading post (possibly Noel LeVasseur’s trading post of 1832 or 1833). The later farmhouse bears no resemblance to the pioneer structure because it was rebuilt by me. So, our home, if not the oldest structure in Kankakee County, contained older structures, one of them the first post office in Bourbonnais Grove. This small subsistence farmstead, including the timber frame farmhouse, on 3.22 acres of land became our new home for the next 29 years (Johnson, 37). In purchasing additional property, I eventually had more than 200 acres.

Father Charles Chiniquy (1809 - 99)

- * Controversy with Chicago Bishop Anthony O'Regan:
 - French language in liturgy, not Latin;
 - Lay person access to Bible;
 - Democratization of the Church - Trusteeism;
 - Insistence on temperance; and
 - Alleged prejudice against French-Canadian.
- * Served as Maternity Virgin Mary pastor from November 1852 to September 1853;
- * Persuaded three families to leave Bourbonnais Grove for St. Anne;
- * Defended by Abraham Lincoln in 1855 libel suit;
- * Suspended and then excommunicated in August-September 1856;
- * Left Roman Catholic Church and formed Christian Catholic Church of St. Anne (which in 1862 became part of the Canadian Presbyterian Church); and
- * Went back to Canada in 1873 - Presbyterian mission to entice French-Canadians away from the Roman Catholic Church.

Decision #3: Will you follow Fr. Chiniquy or do you support Bishop O'Regan's decision to excommunicate him?




22. **Decision #3: Will you follow Fr. Chiniquy or do you support Bishop O'Regan's decision to excommunicate him?**

In the 1850s, the charismatic and dynamic Father Charles Chiniquy (1809-99) challenged religious and secular authorities in creating a religious schism, the legacy of which still shakes our community. In June 1851, he arrived in Bourbonnais Grove at age 42. Fr. Chiniquy told the pastor Fr. Corrujault that he had been sent upon the request by the Bishop of Chicago Vendeveld to give sermons on temperance, count the faithful, and survey the settlements southeast of Bourbonnais Grove. He founded a French Canadian colony in the Beaver Mission area which he dedicated to St. Anne. By April 1852, he had recruited 50 families from Canada to St. Anne. About that same time, Fr. Chiniquy planted a cross at L'Erable 15 miles west of St. Anne.

As pastor of MBVM parish (1852-53), he officiated at the first marriage ceremony in Kankakee County on May 29, 1853. He recruited settlers in Canadian, French, and Belgian newspapers to northeastern Illinois. He served both churches (Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church and St. Anne Church) until September 1853 when he led an exodus of three French-Canadian Catholic families from Bourbonnais Grove to St. Anne. The relatively new timber church that had been dedicated "on June 2, 1849, and renamed for the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary burned to the ground in 1853, and Fr. Charles Chiniquy was the primary suspect" (*Maternity*, 9). From 1851-55, Fr. Chiniquy enticed between 900 and 1000 French-Canadian families to settle in a 40 mile square area around St. Anne (Brettell, 31).

He was defended by Abraham Lincoln in 1855 libel suit against Peter Spink. By September 1856, Fr. Chiniquy was suspended from performing his priestly duties, excommunicated in November 1857 by Bishop Anthony O'Regan. The controversy between Fr. Chiniquy and Bishop O'Regan was over Chiniquy's insistence on 1) French as the language for mass and sermons, not Latin; 2) laymen access to the Bible; 3) a democratization of the Catholic Church—Trusteeism; and 4) the Irish bishop's alleged prejudice against French-Canadian priests and Catholics. Father Chiniquy also supported bans on alcohol and abolition of slavery.

After his excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church, Fr. Chiniquy founded on April 8, 1858, the First Presbyterian Church. He went back to Canada in 1873 to begin Presbyterian mission to entice French-Canadians away from the Roman Catholic Church. Caroline Brettell states in her book *Following Father Chiniquy* “ during the three years after Chiniquy's arrival in Illinois [1851], it is estimated that between 900 and 1000 families left Quebec and some of the New England states to settle on forty square miles of land in central Illinois with the newly renamed town of St. Anne at its center (Brettell, 35).



Population Change

1853: the coming of the railroad and formation of Kankakee County

- * 1850—Bourbonnais Township—1720 (248 families of which 201 or 80% were French-Canadian);
- * 1853—County of Kankakee—8000
- * 1880, Bourbonnais Township—1589;
- * 1880, Kankakee—5782;
- * 1890, Bourbonnais Township—1523;
- * 1890, Kankakee—7186;
- * 1900, Bourbonnais Township—3093;
- * 1900, Village of Bourbonnais—595 [this population number would not increase until 1957];
- * 1900, Village of Bradley—1518;
- * 1900, Kankakee—13,595.

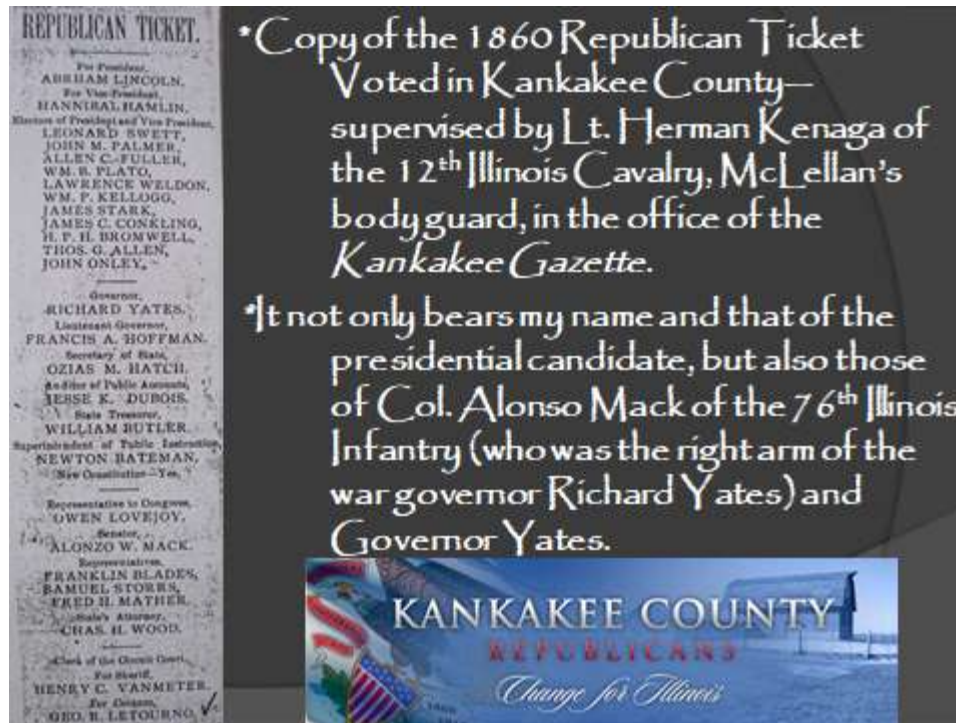
Decision #4: Do you favor or oppose the rapid growth of the city of Kankakee caused by the coming of the railroad?

23. The executives of the Illinois Central Railroad decided on the route of the new north-south rails. On July 4, 1853, the iron horse steamed over the ridge on the bend of the Kankakee River with no civic reception because hardly anyone lived there. The IC created the town of Kankakee as it did Chebanse and Manteno. The east-west settlements along the Kankakee River would now be replaced by railroad induced north-south settlements. The town of Kankakee began to grow when the IC located a depot there in 1855.

The new county in 1853 had a population of 8,000 people. The population of Bourbonnais Township in 1850 was 1,720 with 81% or 201 out of 248 families of French-Canadian descent (www.lib.niu.edu/2005/iht1220528.html). By the end of the nineteenth-century, the new Village of North Kankakee (became Bradley in 1895) would have a population of 4000 in 1892 and Kankakee would have a population of 13,500 in 1900 (Kenaga-Letourneau, 691). After the new railroad depot was built in 1898, Kankakee's population soared while Bourbonnais's would decrease by 1900 to ¼ of its size in 1850 (Houde and Klasey, 38).

On February 11, 1853, Captain Francis Seguin, Noel LeVasseur, and I participated in the organizing of Kankakee County out of southern Will and northern Iroquois Counties. By 1856, we three friends helped found the county's Republican Party, and turned the tide of the county to the Republican side. The rural part of the county resided in the Republican camp while merchants and professional men were mainstays of the county's Democratic Party. The Civil War obscured party lines in the county until rivalry resumed in 1868. By 1880, many political campaigns became bitterly contested (Kenaga-Letourneau as quoting Daniel Paddack, 655).

Decision # 4: Do you favor or oppose the rapid growth of the city of Kankakee caused by the coming of the railroad?



24. **Part 2** of this course begins with Abraham Lincoln’s and my name on the 1860 Republican ballot. I had earlier represented the new Kankakee County in the first Republican Convention held at Bloomington, Illinois on May 29, 1856—serving as an alternate to Noel LeVasseur, the regular delegate. This convention established the Illinois Republican Party. The party was formed in 1854 by former Whigs and anti-slavery activists. It was at this time that I first met the “rail splitter” from Springfield, Abraham Lincoln (1809-65). He was 47 years old at the time, and soon to gain national name recognition as he would campaign in 1858 against Stephen Douglas for senator and then in 1860, run as our Republican Party candidate for the presidency of the United States. I was only half Lincoln’s age in 1856, at that time 25 years old and very impressed by his knowledge and eloquence. At this Republican Convention, I—and the whole audience—were so spell bound by Lincoln’s “Lost Speech”—an impassioned condemnation of slavery and the precedent for his famous “House Divided” speech delivered in Springfield at the Illinois State Republican Convention on June 17, 1858—that we did not take notes. Our first Republican Convention began with the purpose of opposing the Douglas-sponsored 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act (which would allow popular sovereignty to decide whether to allow slavery or not) and culminated in the formation of the Illinois Republican Party. We Republicans were divided into three camps: Radical or Black—abolitionists who saw slavery as a sin, Moderate—for “free soil” (opposed both slavery and abolitionism), and Conservative—slavery was bad because it hurt white people and blocked progress. I, and my colleagues from Bourbonnais Grove, were Radical Republicans.


Although Lincoln was instrumental in forging the shape of our new Republican Party, at our first national convention held in Philadelphia in 1856, he placed second

to William Dayton in the contest to become our party's candidate for vice president. The first Republican Party candidate for president was retired army officer John Fremont.

Let us return briefly to my political philosophy. I am really proud of having my name on the 1860 Republican ballot. Our presidential candidate's name is at the top and my name is at the bottom. Since I was a French-Canadian Roman Catholic, I supported the abolitionist position in our party. Dr. Jaime Balmes (1810-48) claimed that Protestantism had a poorer anti-slavery record than Catholicism. He cited many Church documents dating from the fifth-century that were anti-slavery (www.medicolegal.tripod.com/catholicslavery.htm). Slavery had been abolished in Canada by Great Britain way back in 1833. My family, French-Canadian friends, and myself welcomed the inattention and focus on us that some unenlightened Americans had been sponsoring.

My Political Career


- *Bourbonnais Township Supervisor—1856, 1867, and 1876;
- *Delegate to First Republican State Convention at age 25 where we were spellbound by Lincoln's "Lost Speech" —1856, the "rail splitter" was 47 years old;
- *Kankakee County Coroner—1860-63;
- *Circuit Clerk of Kankakee County—1872-76;
- *First Mayor of Bourbonnais at age 44—1875-76;
- *Kankakee County Sheriff—1882-86;
- *Kankakee County Treasurer—1886-90;
- *Mayor of Kankakee at age 60—1891-92;
- *Illinois State Senator (38th and 39th General Assemblies)—1892-96; and
- *Deputy County Treasurer—1896-1906



25. I earlier served as Bourbonnais Township Supervisor in 1856 (and again later in 1867 and 1876). I was soon elected as Kankakee county coroner (1860-63), running for office on the same 1860 ballot as fellow Republican Abraham Lincoln; and Bourbonnais Township supervisor. I later served as Kankakee county sheriff (1882-86), county treasurer (1886-90), mayor of Kankakee in 1891, two-term state senator of the 16th Senatorial District of Illinois (1892-96 in the 38th and 39th General Assemblies), and deputy county treasurer (1896-1906) under N.G. Halsey, Jr.'s leadership. While of member of the Illinois General Assemblies, I served as chairman of the Labor and Manufacturing Committee and as a member of nine other committees (Judicial Department and Practice, Appropriations, Public Building and Grounds, Canals and Rivers, Mines and Mining, County Township Organization, Federal Relations, Railroads, License and Miscellaneous, and Printing). I served under Democratic Governor John Peter Altgelt's administration from 1892-96. As governor, he achieved national prominence in 1893 when he pardoned three anarchists convicted of the Haymarket bombing and in 1894 was critical of the federal government's intervention in the Pullman strike. I witnessed the governor ruthlessly dismissing many Republican appointees as he rewarded Democratic Party members with patronage positions. However, he was committed to progressive ideas, and some reform legislation was passed during his governorship—e.g., a factory inspection act, a women's 8-hour law, and an act prohibiting discrimination against union members.

Decision # 5: Will you vote "yes" or "no" on the April 13, 1875 referendum endorsing the incorporation of Bourbonnais Grove into the Village of Bourbonnais?

Yes:
Autonomy;
Raise revenue;
Better services;
Efficient record keeping.



No:
More freedom;
Extra privacy;
Less government regulation;
Lower taxes.

Our home as depicted in the 1883 Atlas of Kankakee County.

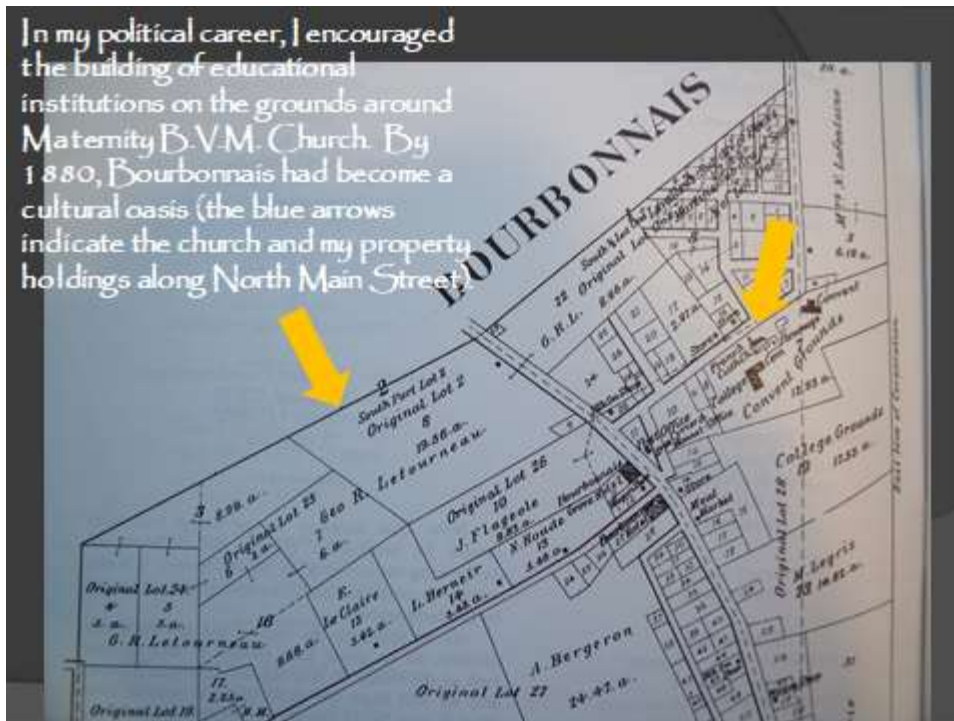
26. The physical expansion of our home reflected the broadening of my own political career. In 1875, the question of whether or not to incorporate our settlement of Bourbonnais Grove into a village was to be resolved. The primary argument opposed to incorporation included paying taxes to support the common good of the village and the primary argument in favor of incorporation was that an efficient organization with proper record keeping would be established.

The favorable vote to incorporate came on April 13, 1875 in a vote of 39 "yes" and 1 "no". I was then chosen as the first president of the new village's board of trustees, and therefore *de facto* first mayor of Bourbonnais. One month later on May 13, 1875, the village was declared legally incorporated (Johnson-*Sesquicentennial*, 68, 70). I was the only person to have been first village president of Bourbonnais and then mayor of the city of Kankakee. As Adrien Richard stated in his book *The Village: A Story of Bourbonnais*, "Who was to head up the new village board [the Village of Bourbonnais was incorporated in the spring of 1875] . . . it was generally agreed that the logical choice for president made by the new board, was George R. Letourneau. It is a known fact that Mr. Letourneau, a very active man in the community, having been elected Circuit Clerk of Kankakee County three years before in 1872 [I served in this office from 1872-76], and being very well indoctrinated in the administration of government, was the logical choice of the board to guide the destinies of this budding village" (17).

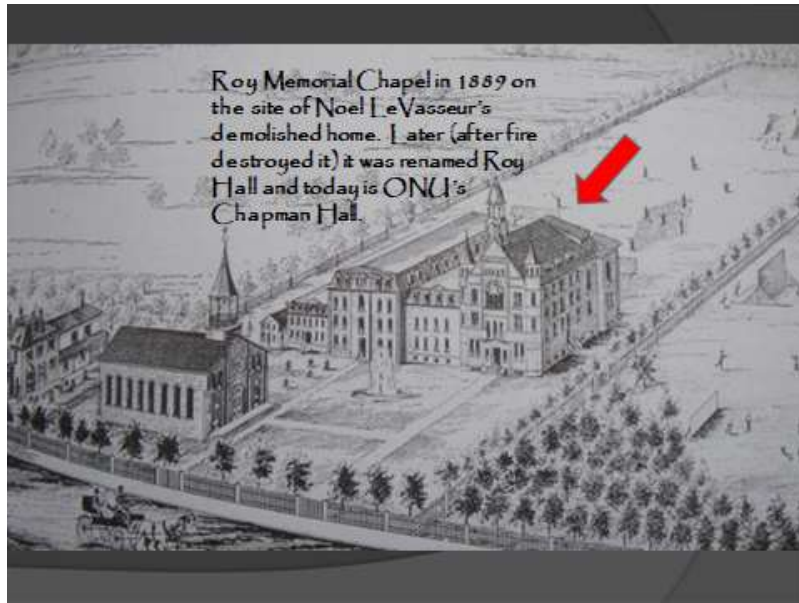
Decision #5: Will you vote "yes" or "no" on the April 13, 1875 referendum endorsing the incorporation of Bourbonnais Grove into the Village of Bourbonnais?

My Later Work and Interests
*Grain business with Noel Brousseau—
1869-75;
*Grain business with Hiram Kenaga—
1875-80;
*Wholesale grocery business with Joseph
St. Louis and John Barland—1892;
*Co-authored with William Kenaga in
1906 *Historical Encyclopedia of Il-
linois and History of Kankakee
County, Volume II.*

27. While farming on our property, I also became engaged in the grain business with Noel Brosseau in 1869. I bought out Mr. Brosseau in 1875 and contracted a partnership with Hiram Kenaga which continued until 1880 when I sold my interest to Charles Johnson. Around 1892, I became involved in the wholesale grocery business with my son-in-law Joseph St. Louis and John Barland. I later sold my interest to Fred Legris. During the last year of my life, I co-authored with William Kenaga the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Kankakee County, Volume II.*



28. In the nineteenth-century, Bourbonnais and Kankakee changed significantly. When I first arrived in Bourbonnais Grove in 1848, I attended church at St. Leo's Chapel, a wooden structure which had been built in 1841. A new church renamed as Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary replaced the chapel in 1849. This was the church that Elodie and I were married in. As I mentioned earlier, it burned to the ground in 1853. In 1855, work began on a new church to be constructed of local limestone. Construction was completed in 1858. Over 150 years later during your present time, this Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church appears the way it was when I attended services there. Our daughters attended the new Notre Dame Convent and School for girls upon its completion in 1862. Our sons were instructed by the Viatorian priests and brothers in the Bourbonnais Grove public school and then St. Viator Academy after 1868. Several of our sons went on to St. Viator College which was granted a university charter in 1874 when the Viatorians were granted a university charter. When I became mayor of Bourbonnais in 1875, the community was already a thriving educational center. A new boy's school, another St. Viator Academy, was built in 1891. As I wrote in 1901, I "spent the best portion of [my] life in Bourbonnais and . . . was greatly instrumental in organizing and helping to build up Bourbonnais and especially the building of its educational institutions which have proven to be the very source of bringing up [my] young fellow countrymen to the prominence they now enjoy; and who also participated in the affairs of our county. . ." (Letourneau).



29. When I arrived in Bourbonnais Grove in 1847, the log schoolhouse was about to close. The history of formal education in Bourbonnais Grove between the closing of the log schoolhouse in 1848 and 1852 is sketchy. For two years, 1852-54, four Sisters of Mercy tried to begin a parish school. However, the nuns were recalled to Chicago because the parish could not support the school. From 1857-59, the parish tried again—unsuccessfully—to start a school with the Sisters of the Holy Cross from South Bend. Perhaps the church fire and cost of building a new church from 1854-58, left little financial support for a school.

A continuum of educational success began on October 1, 1860 when three Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame opened classes for 50 girl students in a small stone house on the corner of Roy and Marsile Streets. In January 1861, the nuns moved their home and school into a two-story stone building on land just east of the Maternity BVM Church. This building had been constructed at the expense of Bourbonnais Grove in 1859. This school for girls became known as Notre Dame Academy. A larger three-story frame convent for the nuns and academy was completed on August 1, 1862, and expanded until 1910. This building was located just north of the church where East Marsile turns north onto Convent Street. This “new wood frame building could accommodate female students from grade school though high school, including a small number of boarding students. On August 16, 1862, the sisters officially moved into the new building, as did their first ten boarding students” (*Maternity BVM Celebrating 150*, 11).

Boys’ education remained in the hands of secular teachers in the Bourbonnais Grove public school until 1868—using the same two-story stone building that was vacated as a school by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in 1861. The Viatorian Order (who had served the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church since 1865) began teaching in the public school and

soon bought the building from the Bourbonnais Grove school board. By 1868 the school was fully under Viatorian control and renamed the St. Viator Academy. By 1874, the school complex included a three-story building. In that year the academy was offering college level courses in French, Latin, philosophy, mathematics, vocal and instrumental music, theology, and commerce. Accordingly, the Viatorians were offered a university charter by the Illinois state legislature in 1874. St. Viator College was born and began to offer degrees in arts, sciences, and letters.

I once wrote in a 1901 issue of the *Kankakee Gazette* “I spent the best portion of my life in Bourbonnais and . . .was greatly instrumental in organizing and helping to build up Bourbonnais and especially the building of its educational institutions which have proven to be the very source of bring up my fellow countrymen to the prominence they now enjoy; and who also participated in the affairs of our country . . . “(Letourneau, *The Herald*, “Guest Columnist”).

- *George was a bookkeeper, married three times, first wife was Lucy LeVasseur who bore him son Albert, had three children altogether, died between 1922-33 in Chicago;
- *Elodie 'Elizabeth' attended Notre Dame Convent/Academy, married medical Dr. Victor Bergeron, had four children, lived in Chicago, died in 1933;
- *Beatrice 'Agnes' married Joseph St. Louis, had one son and raised son of deceased sister Eugenie, also one adopted daughter, died in 1922;
- *Eugenie married medical Dr. Frederic Marcotte, lived in Cloud County, Kansas, had four children, died in 1894 in Concordia, Kansas;
- *Philip graduated from Northwestern Medical School, married fellow graduate Mary Lesage, lived in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, had four children, divorced, moved and practiced in Iowa, remarried, had two more children, farmed in San Antonio, Texas, died 1932;
- *Robert graduated from St. Viator College and then Northwestern Medical School became a Chicago surgeon, married three times with three children, died in 1945;

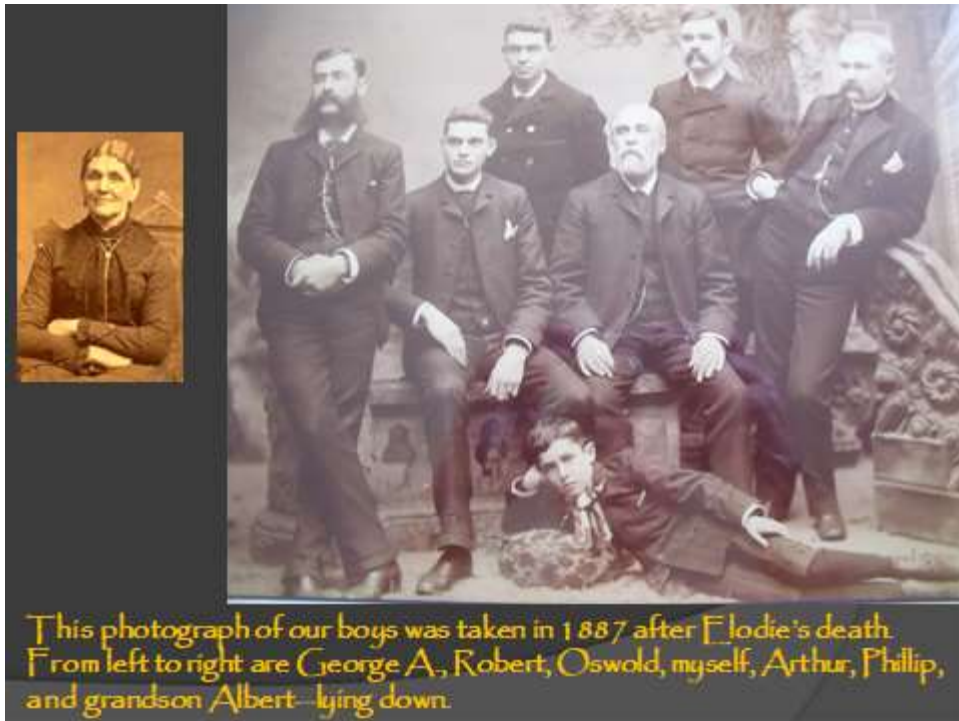
30. So Proud of Our Children

- *George was a bookkeeper, married three times, first wife was Lucy LeVasseur who bore him son Albert, had three children altogether, died between 1922-33 in Chicago;
- *Elodie 'Elizabeth' attended Notre Dame Convent/Academy, married medical Dr. Victor Bergeron, had four children, lived in Chicago, died in 1933;
- *Beatrice 'Agnes' married Joseph St. Louis, had one son and raised son of deceased sister Eugenie, also one adopted daughter, died in 1922;
- *Eugenie married medical Dr. Frederic Marcotte, lived in Cloud County, Kansas, had four children, died in 1894 in Concordia, Kansas;
- *Philip graduated from Northwestern Medical School and married fellow graduate Mary Lesage, lived in Chippewa Fall, Wisconsin, had four children, divorced, moved and practiced in Iowa, remarried, had two more children, farmed in San Antonio, Texas, died in 1932;
- *Robert graduated from St. Viator College and then Northwestern Medical School became a Chicago surgeon, married three times with three children, died in 1945;

- * Arthur became a local pharmacist, lived in Manteno , then moved to California, married Minnie Volkers, had four children, died after 1948;
- * Marie never married and provided companionship for me and her sister Corrine, organized and prepared social gatherings at their homes in Bourbonnais and Kankakee, died in 1936;
- * Louise was a beautiful and accomplished young woman with many talents, she lived with me in Kankakee, died in 1896 of tuberculosis at age of 27;
- * 'Oswold' graduated from St. Viator College and then West Point, studied dentistry, graduated from Chicago College of Dental Surgery, practiced in Chicago, married twice (Minnie Whittum who died during childbirth in 1898, and Eugenie Trudeau), had one child, died in 1932;
- * 'Corrine' lived seventy of her seventy-four years in Bourbonnais and Kankakee, she never married, died in 1948 in Chicago; and
- * Grandson Albert married Albia Roy in 1898 and died in 1900.

31. *Arthur became a local pharmacist, lived in Manteno and then moved to California, married Minnie Volkers, had four children, died after 1948;
- *Marie never married and provided companionship for me and her sister Corrine, organized and prepared social gatherings at their homes in Bourbonnais and Kankakee, died in 1936;
- *Louise was a beautiful and accomplished young woman with many talents, she lived with me in Kankakee, died in 1896 of tuberculosis at age of 27;
- *'Oswold' graduated from St. Viator College and then West Point, studied dentistry, graduated from Chicago College of Dental Surgery, practiced in Chicago, married twice (Minnie Whittum who died during childbirth in 1898, and Eugenie Trudeau), had one child, died in 1932;
- *'Corrine' lived seventy of her seventy-four years in Bourbonnais and Kankakee, she never married, died in 1948 in Chicago; and
- *Grandson Albert married Albia Roy in 1898 and died in 1900.

While we were all gathered as one family, we had our photographs taken.




32. No additional narrative for this slide.



33. No additional narrative for this slide.

- **Kankakee Gazette* editor Charles Holt;
- *1891—boomer, organizes syndicate North Kankakee Syndicate Assoc.;
- *March 1891—Kankakee population 7168;
- *April 1891—new Kankakee mayor;
- *May 4, 1891—*Kankakee Gazette* headline
 Hardebeck the Hustler has a Big Scheme in Hand—Nearly One Thousand Acres Under Contract (North Kankakee subdivision with factories announced);
- *Agent for new trolley system;
- *Brassy ad campaign for North Kankakee;
- *Kankakee strapped by pending Panic of 1893;
- *November 4, 1892—North Kankakee incorporates as a separate community;
- *North Kankakee boom bubble bursts in spring 1893; and
- *January '95—Hardebeck and others make deal with J. Harley Bradley.



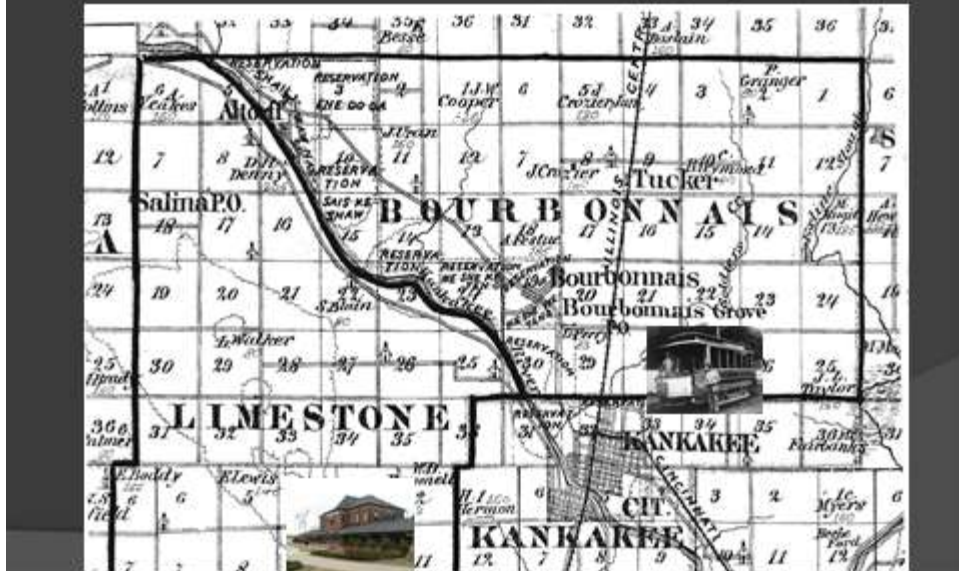
J. Herman Hardebeck
(1842-1911)

Decision #6: Was J. Herman Hardebeck a self-promoting hustler or a hero of community revitalization?

34. As mayor of Kankakee from 1891-92, I was the first Republican to win that office in a number of years, and had to deal with a Democratic majority city council (Johnson-Bradley, 29). This majority was not about to accept my requests without a fight. Just after the election in April 1891, I had to deal with the May 4 bombshell trumpeted in the *Kankakee Gazette* headline “Hardebeck the Hustler has a Big Scheme in Hand—Nearly One Thousand Acres Under Contract” (Johnson-Sesquicentennial, 116). North Kankakee was expanding to include many factory and town lot sites. An example of the friction between me and the city council, in which my sentiment prevailed, was the declaration of eminent domain to have the city of Kankakee acquire a strip of Diederich Ehrich’s farmland for the opening of a roadway to connect Kankakee to the Illinois Central lines to the new North Kankakee (Bradley) factories (Johnson-Bradley, 41).

Decision #6: Was J. Herman Hardebeck a self-promoting hustler or a hero of community revitalization?

This map indicates Bourbonnias Township in 1887 with photographs of the new Kankakee railroad depot built in 1898 and the electric streetcar which debuted in 1894.



35. I experienced a financial dip in August 3, 1893 when Kankakee's First National Bank closed. I was one of the stockholders (*Johnson-Sesquicentennial*, 125). In 1894, the North Kankakee Electric Light and Railway Company electric trolley, connecting Kankakee and Bourbonnias with only a half-hour travel time to either work, shop, or play, became a reality. Electricity along with the streetcars brings "new light" to Bourbonnias. A nominal fee of five cents was charged to the passengers. It was common for the students of St. Viator College to try the patience and play pranks on the motorman. After the four-wheel cars were introduced, the students found that they could make the cars jump off their tracks.

Our home in Kankakee at 605 South
Greenwood in Kankakee.



36. After I was elected county sheriff in 1882, we were required by law to move from our Bourbonnais home to the county seat in Kankakee. Elodie and I lived in a beautiful home at 605 South Greenwood in Kankakee where we hosted many social gatherings and resided until our deaths—her's on January 19, 1887 at the age of 53 and mine on December 12, 1906 at the age of 75. For the last three years of her life, Elodie had been an invalid suffering from consumption (tuberculosis). As I mentioned earlier, all of our family was present with her around her deathbed. She was a model wife and mother and the affection in which she held all those dear to her was fully reciprocated.

I died at 7:30 am on Wednesday December 12, 1906 at the age of 75. My funeral was at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Kankakee. I am buried in our family plot at Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary cemetery about ¼ mile east of the river I loved so much.




37. Poor health of Bright's disease (kidney disease) had overtaken me during the last two years of my life. I rebounded, but just after leaving office, I began a rapid decline. After a short illness, I died on December 12, 1906 at the age of 75. My funeral mass was held at St. Rose of Lima Church and I was buried in Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary cemetery near the river that I loved so much.

People have said that I was a good son, husband, father, friend, and public servant. In addition to my family life and political career, I was a miner, freight operator, farmer, grain merchant, and grocery man. I was always a hard worker, and tried to live of integrity. I had a kindly and generous disposition, and gave freely to the poor all my life. Fame and fortune were never my primary goal. At the time of my death, I was by no means rich, yet I left enough to provide for those who depended on me. I was respected and admired for my pioneer work, unrighteousness, faithfulness, kindly spirit, and a private and public life above reproach. I have always encouraged others to pursue their ambitions and visions. I have always been a strong promoter of Bourbonnais, Kankakee, and Kankakee County. I believe that Kankakee is one of the most beautiful and prosperous cities of its size in the West.

Decision #7: How have you addressed the prejudice against you as a French-Canadian: quietly acquiesce or speak out and awaken others to their systemic bias?

- * Foreign birth;
- * Foreign Language;
- * Roman Catholic—dominated by priests and nuns;
- * Inward looking population not concerned with others;
- * Little interest in education or better housing;
- * Low degree of both geographical and social mobility;
- * Minimal expectations;
- * Unwillingness to get involved with strikes and other union activities;
- * Low rates of naturalization; and
- * Resistant to assimilation.



38. Decision #7: How have you addressed the prejudice against you as a French-Canadian: quietly acquiesce or speak out and awaken others to their systemic bias?

The composite image of the French-Canadian immigrant population was, as stated by Caroline Brettell “an inward-looking population dominated by priests, with little interest in education or better housing, with a low degree of both geographical and social mobility, with minimal expectations, an unwillingness to get involved in strikes and other union activities, with low rates of naturalization, and generally with resistance to assimilation” (Brettell, 4).

I remarked in a 1901 column for the *Kankakee Gazette* that “the first French Canadian settlers encountered many obstacles that greatly retarded their advancement. The principle one was because of their foreign birth and language and also of their religious belief, but I thank God that those prejudices have disappeared never to be known again. The people in those early days were not accustomed to mingle with foreign-born people . . . The French Canadians of this county have been well represented in the public offices for many years with the honor to themselves and county. While they have been represented once in the legislature of our state they have not yet been represented by appointment or otherwise in any of the departments of the federal government of our common country when they have unsuccessfully applied. They are well and ably represented in the finances of our city and county, also in the medical profession, at the bar, in commerce and other enterprises. We have seen the French Canadian fathers and mothers give up their dear ones to the defense of our common country as readily as any other nationality. The world nationality is fast disappearing as it is better realized now than it has ever been before that we are one people living, prospering and enjoying the same respect, liberty and advantages under the same flag, the stars and stripes” (Letourneau).

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Part 3: Interaction with George Letourneau

- My 1889 Patriot Manifesto;
- As George's friend (you lived from 1831-1906) you may now ask your questions.



41. [What follows is an excerpt from an issue of the April 1899 *Kankakee Daily Gazette*.] “One Saturday night in April 1899, the west side Republicans presented their slate of candidates to the public over at Suprenant’s hall. They were kind enough to ask me to say a few words on behalf of Col. Clark, who was running for mayor of Kankakee at that time. I did so, after which I gave the audience, mostly working men, a reminder of their duties as citizens of one of the finest countries of the world. The *Kankakee Daily Gazette* flattered me by printing my short talk in their paper. Here is what I said that Saturday evening back in 1899:

‘I have lived within two miles of this hall since I was 15 years of age, I told them, and have lived in Kankakee sixteen years. (I moved there in 1881, at the time I was elected Kankakee county sheriff.) I have worked on the farm; I have been through the mill. I want to say to you that the right of suffrage is the most sacred privilege conferred upon an American citizen. It is you who make the laws. By your votes you choose the men to carry out your principles. If there is any complaint against the laws or the manner in which they are administered you have yourselves to blame. You can, under the primary system, vote for any man you choose and no one can find out how you vote; your ballot is sacred, and it counts just as much as the vote of the millionaire. Having, therefore, this high privilege this sacred duty, this great power, you ought to consider it an insult if any man comes to you with the offer of a cigar or a glass of beer to influence your vote. It is equivalent to telling you in so many words that he has no confidence in your honesty and intelligence or ability to determine for yourself what is right. Another thing: Don’t wait for a carriage to be sent to drag you to the polls. The value of the franchise is so great, so important, that you ought to make it the first duty of

the day, after kissing your wife, if you have one, to go to the polls with a free step and your head erect and cast your ballot.””

[Using Letourneau’s 1889 insights about patriotism, Vic Johnson wrote the following speech for Jim Carlson—portraying George Letourneau—to deliver at the Letourneau Home/Museum commemorating the July 4, 1989 bicentennial celebration. He exhorts French-Canadians to commemorate July 4 as their national holiday instead of St. John the Baptist Day, the French-Canadian national holiday.]

[Using July 4, 1989 as a reference point] “One hundred years ago my fellow citizens of this community, Bourbonnais, came together to celebrate Independence Day. We resolved to put aside the bonds that held us to Canada and rekindle our patriotism in memory of the great deeds of our fathers; it must not be forgotten we told one another, that we have found here a new country strong and great which has held out its arms to us and which accepted and loved us as its own children. We chose then the Fourth of July, the national holiday of the great American people, united with us in the same patriotic spirit and love for the mother country and the recognition that we now are devoted to this country that so generously accepted us. That devotion to flag and country is our legacy to you. Guard it well. God bless you all. *Adieu*” (Johnson, Nov. 15, 2011, unpublished email notes). Vic Johnson added that “Letourneau translated the Declaration of Independence into French for his fellow French-Canadians who probably could not read English. I don’t believe many people realize Letourneau was not only a very esteemed and practical politician but also a great American patriot” (Johnson, Nov. 15, 2011 unpublished email notes).

I will end my discourse today with my analysis of all the transformations that I have experienced in my life. The most difficult was challenging prejudice against we French-Canadians and others. I have stood up against this unenlightened prejudice since I arrived in this country in 1847. I hope that I have been a living example of how this prejudice is to be seen what it really is: ignorance in action. My friends, *mon amis*, I implore you to continue speaking out and awakening others to the immorality of prejudice and racism. I bid you now *adieu*!