

An American Utopia and a Narrative of French Emigration

Part One

by Vic Johnson

With a few exceptions, the first emigrants of French lineage arriving in Noel LeVasseur's Bourbonnais Grove settlement came from Canada in the 1830s and 1840s.

In later years, families arrived directly from France and the French speaking parts of Belgium, Wallony. Thanks to our local historical and genealogical societies we know quite a lot about that history and those families.

Other families from France landed first on the gulf coast ports of Mobile, Biloxi and New Orleans during the early 18th century. They journeyed upriver to settle in the French colonial villages near St. Louis, located on both the east and west sides of the Mississippi River.

And then, in 1849, several French families, about 280 people, accompanied Étienne Cabet to the once Mormon community of Nauvoo in western Illinois. They called themselves "Icarians".

Icarians had many supporters in France, where Cabet, inspired by the idea of creating a Utopia, had founded this egalitarian movement. Followers of the Icarians forged an idealistic society of believers. They held to the principles of equality, religious freedom and a community without property or money.

During the following decade the Nauvoo colony prospered, but, near the end, disagreements on policy and leadership caused a loss of almost half the members to a new settlement in Missouri. Other members founded a third Icarian colony in Iowa. By 1860, the remaining Nauvoo members disbanded. Some of their descendants still can be found in Nauvoo.

In France, during the 1790s, the reign of King Louis XVI would end; a revolution ripped apart French society and middle class citizens sought to escape the raging Reign of Terror. Another mass immigration of the French, this time from the city of Paris, found its way to America.

The story began in 1786. During that year, Rufus Putnam and Benjamin Tupper organized the Ohio Company of Associates; the purpose, to speculate in land development along the Ohio River.

A company representative negotiated a favorable deal with William Duer, Treasury Board assistant and Arthur St. Clair, president of the Confederation Congress. The Ohio Company would buy 1,500,000 acres in Ohio country for \$500,000 and pay another \$500,000 once survey work was finished.

Congress allowed the company to acquire a portion of the land with military warrants and, for the time being, retain an option on a remaining 2,500,000 acres of the land grant.

Another 100,000 acres contributed by Congress formed a buffer zone between proposed settlements and Indian tribes of the Northwest Territory.

A settlement called Adelphia was chosen as The Ohio Company headquarters. In time, Adelphia would be renamed Marietta, in honor of Marie Antoinette.

Another group of speculators in 1789 organized the Scioto Company. They agreed by contract with the Ohio Company and Congress to sell 4,500,000 acres (some sources cite 3,500,000 acres) of the original grant.

Scioto stockholders sent Joel Barlow to Paris. Barlow, a Scot named William Playfair and six agents sold French citizens 150,000 acres. It appears in the long run the Scioto Company could not pay the Ohio Company for land sold. Playfair was accused of absconding with the money. The Scioto Company collapsed. Ownership of the Scioto option reverted to the Ohio Company.

On February 19, 1791, the first French Scioto emigrants sailed from Havre de Grace, bound for their new home at a place called Gallipolis (Land of Gauls), located on property their deeds said they owned, but to which they had no enforceable claim. These cosmopolitan expatriates found the Land of Gauls a wild and lonely place in a wilderness on the west bank of the Ohio River. Empty, newly built log cabins—80, in four rows of 20, flanked by four blockhouses—stood waiting on a barren public square.

(To be continued)

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history. Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March through December. Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month, March through December or by appointment. Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove or call 1-815-933-6452.

Award for Teaching Excellence presented

Michael Stanfa, JD, received the 2015 Willis E. Snowbarger Award for Teaching Excellence, announced during Olivet Nazarene University's 2015 School of Graduate and Continuing Studies (SGCS) commencement ceremony in May.

Since 2009, Stanfa has served as an adjunct professor at Olivet and a SGCS network representative. He teaches general education courses, bachelor's and master's degree-level business courses and nursing courses in healthcare law and ethics.

"Students praise his demonstrated command of a broad knowledge base for the subjects he teaches and his ability to teach those subjects effectively," said Susie Enfield, the SGCS RN-BSN program director, in her nomination of professor Stanfa. "Our students also appreciate the respect he shows them and the fact that he treats them like adults in the

classroom. He engages them in real-world experiences, even scheduling mock trials before a Kankakee judge."

Previously in his career, Stanfa was senior vice-president with People's Bank and KFS Bank in Kankakee County and executive vice-president with Kankakee Bancorp. He was a partner with Kravets and Stanfa, a general civil practice in Chicago emphasizing bankruptcy, collections, residential real estate, wills and trusts.

His volunteer work includes serving as a director for Hospice of Kankakee Valley, on the board of directors for Presence St. Mary's Hospital and Kankakee River Valley Chamber of Commerce and as a speaker for mandatory continuing legal education with the Illinois State Bar Association.

In addition to his bachelor's and juris doctor degrees from Loyola University in Chicago, Stanfa holds a certificate in

human resources from the Graduate School of Banking in Madison, WI. He is a graduate of the Graduate School of Community Bank Management, The Institute of Financial Education at the University of Texas at Austin. He and his wife, Kathy, have two adult children and five grandchildren.

The Snowbarger Award honors the legacy of Dr. Willis E. Snowbarger by recognizing the outstanding service of an adjunct faculty member. Dr. Snowbarger served Olivet as a professor, dean and vice-president for academic affairs. He was instrumental in developing Olivet's expanded liberal arts and professional curriculum, building a strong faculty and achieving numerous accreditation initiatives.

ONU is an accredited Christian, liberal arts university with its main campus in Bourbonnais.

County unemployment drops

The Kankakee-Bradley Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which shares boundaries with Kankakee County, continued to experience the strongest job growth in the state of Illinois in April over the last year. According to preliminary data released May 28, 2015 by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Kankakee County added 1,200 jobs from April, 2014 to April, 2015, which translated to growth of 2.7 percent, the greatest increase among metros statewide.

In March, Kankakee County saw the addition of 1,000 jobs or over, according to IDES and BLS reports.

Unemployment rate fell in Kankakee County from April,

2014 to April, 2015, from 7.9 percent to 5.8 percent. This represents the lowest rate that the metro has experienced since May of 2007. Neighboring Will and Grundy counties registered 6.1 percent and 6.5 percent unemployment rates in April, respectively.

The not seasonally adjusted rate for the state of Illinois was 5.5 percent in April. This was the 14th month in a row that unemployment rates fell in every metro area in the state compared to a year ago.

"The job growth trend that we're seeing in Kankakee County continues to be quite encouraging," said Kankakee County Economic Alliance president and CEO Mike Van Mill. "Industry sees Kankakee County as a sound investment. The widespread expansion that

is currently taking place across our industry sectors is translating to more than 3,000 posted openings for employment at all skill levels in our community."

The Kankakee-Bradley MSA is currently ranked the number one Small Metro in Illinois by global economic think tank the Milken Institute in its Best-Performing Cities index, which measures economic vitality in growth in jobs, wages, salaries and technology output. The county is also currently ranked ninth nationally among small metros for cost of doing business by Forbes.

The Economic Alliance of Kankakee County is a public-private partnership that works to create jobs and expand the economic base by improving the local business climate. For more information, visit kankakeecountyed.org or call 1-815-935-1177.

Super Crossword

Answers

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