

Going West with Paul and Ida Fortin—Part 1

by BGHS member Laurel Soper

When we think about our local history we may not consider that once people settled here, they might decide to settle someplace else. Or their children may decide to move on once they were grown. But this happened quite often. Our ancestors liked to move around.

Between 1880 and the early 1900s, several French Canadian families from the Bourbonnais area, including DesLauriers, Mannies and Fortins, resettled in Turton, SD. The story of Paul and Ida Fortin's odyssey is chronicled in letters to Paul's brother in Kankakee, Louis Xavier Fortin.

The letters don't say what beckoned 46-year-old Charles Paul Appolinaire (Paul) Fortin to the great western plains. Perhaps it was the endless acres of cheap farmland or maybe his older brother Peter's success there.

Pierre Alfred (Peter) Fortin moved to Dakota territory in 1882 (South Dakota became a state in 1889) and became a successful businessman in the town of Turton, opening its first hardware store in 1887. By 1910, Turton boasted a population of 323 and Peter was a prominent citizen, having held positions as postmaster, chairman of the town board and leader of the Turton community band.

Meanwhile, in Kankakee County, brother Paul farmed with his father Celestin. Paul married Ida LaMontagne Haney in 1902. Ida, a widow with two young sons, had lost her first husband, John Haney and two other sons to illness. Paul and Ida, with their five children, Alma, Eli, Isabel Mariah, Anne, Peter and Ida's sons, Thomas and Orville, moved to Turton in 1911. (The youngest, Lucille, would be born in 1913.)

Whatever they were expecting, the Fortins found nothing but desperation, trouble and misery. In Ida's letters to Paul's brother, Louis Xavier Fortin, and his wife Mariah, we learn how difficult life in Turton is for them, juxtaposed by Ida's genteel voice.

March 20, 1911

"Dear Brother and Sister, I am not able to write a long letter back. Am forced to write but a few lines as I really am so busy that I have very little time to myself. I have been trying to straighten out the tangle of furniture in here since my arrival but have made very little headway. Paul is sick in bed with "La Grippe" and Erysipelas, a blood poison the doctor being unable to tell what it was this morning. His face is swollen so that his eyes are completely closed. The flesh is red almost purple with white blotches all over his nose. He is unrecognizable just now. His chest is much swollen also and we all fear "pneumonia". I assure you the prospects are not of the brightest. They are beginning to put in wheat around here, the weather being fine, warm as in May. The boys are getting things in readiness, as best they can. fortunately they seem to like this place real well. But for me its a perfect desert and I fear it always will be. We have been having high winds



Joe Mannie (back row, far right) assisted with Paul Fortin's care during his illness. The Mannie and Fortin families were related through Paul and Peter's parents, Celestin and Marie Martine (Mannie) Fortin.

the last three days blowing fully 60 miles an hour at times. It reminded me of what you told me Louis of this windy country. You are not mistaken. Peter and family came over yesterday with Mr. DesLauriers and wife and all the Mannie boys. Had I met Peter alone any where I never would have known him. He has so changed...Please write soon and let us know how you all are...Wishing you all happiness and trusting I may have better news next time, I remain

Your loving sister Ida

Excuse this lead pencil writing can not find ink and pen. Should Paul get worse will wire. Am sending tickets for gramophone plates. When you play them give a few kind thoughts to those God forsaken people here on the Western planes.

March 22, 1911

Dear Brother Louis, Have just had a phone message from Aberdeen where Paul was taken and report very bad. He was taken to the Hospital but there being no room Dr. Pinell and Peter had to take him to Ward's Hotel. Peter says he is so bad that both doctor and himself shall stay all night there with him. The "Erysipelas" has developed very alarming symptoms, the doctor fearing an abscess in the brain. Peter says it takes three men to hold him. I am at a loss what to do. I am sick myself can hardly move around and so much to be done I expect it will be a call to my funeral next. ...Will write again tomorrow and let you know how Paul is. Best regards to all hoping to hear from you soon. Ida

March 28, 1911

Dear Brother Louis, Peter has just phoned this morning from Aberdeen and asked me to write you and ask you if it would not be possible to send those checks. He says funds are running low and he will soon be running out of cash and if you could send that it would be a great relief. Paul is very very weak but the doctor says he has hopes of his recovery only it will take a long long time. It is going to cost us considerably. You see they would not accept him at the Hospital because he was delirious. It was all 2 men could do to keep him in bed so they had to rent a room at the Hotel and hire a doctor



Photos courtesy of BGHS

Peter Fortin (standing, fourth from the left) Paul's brother, served as the Turton community band director.

and nurse to care for him, and Peter could not leave him there alone among strangers in that condition, so all that and other incidentals has helped to swell the expenses. Peter is tired out so I think Joe Mannie is going to take his place for a couple of days. Yesterday we witnessed one of the worst blizzards that Dakota can put up. The winds must have been blowing 60 miles an hour in fact it blew through everything even in the house we had snowbanks in the beds upstairs about a foot in depth. It was terrible. I never saw anything like it before I believe they are trying their very best to initiate us in their very worst. I am certainly not in love with Dakota I can assure you...Please let me hear from you soon. Am dying to get news from the East.

With best wishes to all and kisses for the children I am Lovingly yours, Ida

Read next month's Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society feature to find out if the Fortins' luck changes and if Paul survives erysipelas.

Sources: Turton, South Dakota Centennial History; 1886-1986, Richard Barrie, 1986. Descendants of Simon Fortin, genealogy narrative. Norma Meier, Aug. 24, 2015. Ida's letters are from the collection of Elizabeth Mimi Raiche, granddaughter of Louis Xavier Fortin.

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 <http://bourbonnaishistory.org>, on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove> or call 1-815-933-6452.

Home Helpers receives 2015 Best of Home Care® Provider and Employer of Choice Awards

Home Helpers of Bourbonnais received both the Best of Home Care Provider of Choice and Employer of Choice Awards from Home Care Pulse. Awarded to only the top ranking home care providers, based on client and caregiver satisfaction scores gathered by Home Care Pulse, Home Helpers is now ranked among a small handful of home care providers across the country who have proven their ability to provide an exceptional working experience to employees and the highest quality care to clients.

"We want to congratulate Home Helpers on receiving both the Best of Home Care Provider of Choice Award and the Best of Home Care Employer of Choice Award," said Aaron Marcum, CEO and founder of Home Care Pulse. "Since these awards are based on real, unfiltered feed-

back from clients and caregivers, Home Helpers has proven their dedication to providing a great work environment and solid training to employees, while maintaining their focus on client satisfaction. We are pleased to recognize their dedication to quality, professionalism and expertise in home care."

Best of Home Care award-winning providers have contracted with Home Care Pulse to gather feedback from their clients and caregivers via live phone interviews each month. Because Home Care Pulse is an independent third-party company, they are able to collect honest and unbiased feedback. These award-winning providers have received the highest satisfaction scores in areas such as professionalism, compassion of caregivers, training and client/caregiver compatibility.

"On behalf of my Home Helpers team and clients I am so thrilled to have received these awards for two years in a row now. Words can't explain my excitement for this achievement," said Home Helpers of Bourbonnais owner Kay Jurica.

To find out more about the Best of Home Care award or Home Care Pulse, visit www.bestofhomecare.com.

Home Helpers is a home care provider founded in 2009 and its mission is to make life easier for you or your loved ones. Visit <http://local.homehelpershomecare.com/kankakee/home/> for more information.



Photo courtesy of Home Helpers

Home Helpers of Bourbonnais received the Best of Home Care Provider of Choice and Employer of Choice Awards from Home Care Pulse. Home Helpers employees include office manager Jessica Kelsey, owner Kay Jurica holding Vinnie, care coordinator Chelsea Paetsch and market manager Jennifer Karraker.