

Emigration from Franche-Comté to North America

The knowledge about emigration from Franche-Comté to North America (Mexico, United States, Canada) in the 18th and 19th centuries is increasing. Strangely, a not insignificant emigration from the Doubs department, and perhaps one of its most important (outside of the Montbéliard area) seems to go relatively unnoticed. I heard of its existence about fifteen years ago, while reading « Le courrier de la Montagne ». There is quite a lot of information today scattered on the Internet.

In Barrens, near Perryville, Missouri, a catholic church and a seminar were founded on a territory which belonged to France not so long before, which partly explains the attraction it had on people from the Doubs department. Victor Javaux de Sainte-Colombe was already there as a forerunner, at the service of the Brothers of the christian church, and of whom it is believed that he played a role in the start of that emigration.

On October 13th, 1840, at the least, twenty three individuals from Levier and five from Villeneuve-d'Amont landed in New Orleans from Swanton for the launch of what was, without a doubt, an agricultural community in Cape Cinque Hommes, on the Mississipi bank, a few kilometers east of Perryville. The original name is probably Cap Saint Cosme.

Arrivals in the spring of 1841 were certainly a lot more important.

In 1847 and 1850, more people arrived.

In 1850, more than 160 people settled in Cape Cinque Hommes from Franche-Comté, mostly from the Levier County, and mainly from Levier itself. Between 1847 and 1850, Victor Javaux's sister's son, who lived in Arc-sous-Montenot settled there.

They were probably not the last people from the Doubs to settled in the Perryville area. There were at least more than fifty departures between 1851 and 1855. While a little bit further, in the Osage and Washington Counties, other people from Franche-Comté (a lot in 1843) settled, mainly from the Valonne surroundings, and some from Levier and Salins-les-Bains. It is actually while tracking down the Seveneys from Levier that I came across that second emigration. The Valonne census indicated 348 inhabitants in 1851, and the number went down to 283 in 1856 (a 20% decrease in 5 years !).

I am not claiming to have done full genealogies, nor that I verified all datas, especially American vital records, there are certainly mistakes. I can only insist that those with an special interest in a family go systematically back to the sources. My goal is simply to condense the information about close to 400 people from Franche Comté, and connect American sources to

Franche Comté civil registry datas. A few researches about arrival dates and the names of boats carrying the migrants are being done as well. Those researches are from being over.

I am not certain at all that, in the first fifteen years, the number of people from Franche-Comté, mainly from Champlitte and the surrounding villages leaving for Mexico (1833-1847) was higher than those leaving for Missouri to Perryville area and Osage County (1840-1854). All the more so that, in the case of emigration to Mexico, mortality rate, departures from the colony and comebacks to France were certainly a lot higher than in the case of Missouri. Anyway, in general, and by comparison, the Cape Cinque Hommes colony is a lot more modest as the French there were almost exclusively from Franche Comtois. In 1850, there were 178 living people who came from France in Cape Cinque Hommes, almost all from Franche Comté. If you want to have an accurate idea of what was a transatlantic journey in the 19th century, I strongly recommended reading « La saga des émigrants » by Vilhem Moberg which relates the departure (2nd volume) and the settling of the Swedes arriving in Minnesota, north of Missouri where settled people from Levier, Septfontaine, Chapelle-d'Huin, Villeneuve d'Amont, Arc-sous-Montenot, Valonne, Mambouhans, etc., and where a certain Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in 1835. He was the author of the immortal « Tom Sawyer » and « Huckleberry Finn », and is better known by his pen name Mark Twain. Let's recall the anecdote about the origin of his pseudonym. The writer had dreamed ever since his early years about driving one of those huge paddle steamer. On those boats, a man in the front measured the river and shouted the results to the pilot : « deep four ! Mark three ! Quarter twain ! Mark Twain ! »

Here are a few press articles from that era :

The Mississipi front is being populated by people from Levier. A new emigration is being prepared, more important than the one of July 1840. Houses and fields are on sale everywhere, and they lack buyers.

The first migrants' letters all brush a wonderful paintings of the new world : according to these letters, many chestnuts and fruit trees can be found in Louisiana ; corn, wheat, rice, rye, barley, oat and coffee grow almost without culture. Wild vine is abundant and make a wine which can only be compared to the best Clos-Vougeot cru ; a sugar liquor flows from certain trees. Vegetables from Europe grow more easily than in France ; partridges, woodcocks, chicken and especially turkeys can be found in such quantities that those birds would invade houses if they were not carefully closed ; finally, there a lots of cows and wild boars. Lands are sold from 6 to 10 francs for 5500 square meters. Few, if any, taxes are being paid, and military service is unknown !

Settlers encourage their former countrymen to not hesitate to leave for that fortunate land.

Source : « Le Courrier de la Montagne » n°11 from Sunday, March 14, 1841. Also published in « Le Franc Comtois » on March 16, 1841.

Levier. Its inhabitants, instead of cultivating their lands, abandon them to run to Canada, risking becoming the fools after believing what the American papers promise.

Source : « Le Courrier de la Montagne » n°14 from April 4, 1841.

The town of Levier was cited as owing its prosperity to the culture of town fields. Let's say that the generation that took part in this is in the grave, and that its kin, not being able to find anymore town fields, leave the city to go to America, after selling their property for dirt cheap.
Source : « Le Courrier de la Montagne » n°27 from July 11, 1841.

A Havre paper writes that a hundred individuals embarked to go to Brazil and Louisiana to found a phalansterian colony. Among the emigrants are Mister Lhomme and his family, from Levier. The latter can be traced to the Périville colony.
Source : « Le Courrier de la Montagne » from October 3, 1841.

Thanks to

Christelle Courtois (Ornans, France)
Diana Hall and Jacques Leboeuf (Ottawa)
Liliane Goulut (Lons-le-Saunier, France)
Susanne Boivin Sommerville (Michigan, USA)
Thierry Boillot (Belfort, France)
<http://doubsgenealogie.fr/>
Archives départementales du Doubs