

A Colony Divided: Religious Schism in the  
French Canadian Settlement around St.  
Joseph, Cloud County, Kansas, 1871-1890s

Jones



It is a sunny Saturday afternoon in Cloud County, Kansas, when the peace of the rolling tallgrass prairie is broken by cries of “Au feu! Au feu!” The French Presbyterian Church just south of St. Joseph’s was ablaze under mysterious circumstances. The dry heat and wind of rural Cloud County only boosted the flames licking the wooden church, whipping them around and threatening surrounding fields. Nothing could be done, and to this day no trace remains of the church besides the small and now severely overgrown cemetery. The tiny congregation of French Canadians had migrated to the area along with the much larger French Canadian Catholic community in the 1870s, and managed to maintain the little Protestant church for a short while. Just as the Catholics had suffered some ridicule under a Protestant majority in their former home of Kankakee, Illinois, the roles on the Kansas prairie were reversed and the Presbyterians were sometimes victims of ridicule. Now that the building had burned, would the Protestants rejoin their compatriots in the Catholic faith? Through an examination of nearby cemeteries, I find that although they preferred Francophone communities, none of the Presbyterian families ever appear to have anything to do with the neighboring Catholic families. Even in a harsh environment, bonds of culture and language stayed strong, but the Catholic/Protestant division stayed even stronger.

The story of Cloud County’s French Canadian colony begins in Canada. Due to land ownership laws, Canada had become quite crowded.<sup>1</sup> Many Quebecois migrated to Kankakee, Illinois, as family units, bringing with them French culture and language as

---

<sup>1</sup> John Cyr, “Historic Landscapes of Cloud County, Kansas” (Master’s thesis, Kansas State University, 1981).

well as a strong sense of Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> One of their own would soon challenge this Catholicism, however. Father Charles Chiniquy was a Catholic priest in Canada, and with the French Canadian movement to Illinois, he was sent to the French Canadian community of St. Anne just outside of Kankakee.<sup>3</sup> Chiniquy demanded more French Canadian priests be sent to fulfill the needs of this French-speaking community, apparently untrusting of nearby Irish priests.<sup>4</sup> Bishop Anthony O'Regan was in charge of the diocese, and he did not approve of the French Canadian tendency to isolate themselves and was afraid it would lead to xenophobic feelings.<sup>5</sup> He had already replaced the priest of a French Canadian church in Chicago with an Irish priest, and Chiniquy feared he would do the same at St. Anne.<sup>6</sup> Chiniquy was suspended from his duties, but as he continued to administer the sacraments, he was excommunicated in 1858.<sup>7</sup> Chiniquy refused to submit to what the Church required of him, and decided to become Protestant. He decided to adhere to the existing Presbyterian denomination rather than start his own,<sup>8</sup> and this he chose because of the Huguenot heritage of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Yves Roby, "Chiniquy, Charles," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* ([http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=6029](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6029), accessed 9 May 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Presbyterian movement.<sup>9</sup> Chiniquy and 2,000 French Canadian followers in the St. Anne/Kankakee area thereby became Protestant.<sup>10</sup>

After the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the French Canadians of Kankakee joined the flood of settlers bound for Kansas. The first French Canadians into Cloud County moved to the fledgling town of Concordia in about 1870.<sup>11</sup> Although French Canadians did not settle Concordia exclusively, they played a large role in the founding of the town. However, we are more concerned with their neighbors to the southeast, at what would become St. Joseph's. When Father Louis Mollier was sent to establish a church here in 1873, Concordia had about 300 inhabitants, and nearby Clyde was even smaller, but the St. Joe's area (known then only as "the French Settlement") had scores of French-culture families.<sup>12</sup> More or less all of the French Canadians who settled in Cloud County were from the Kankakee area, but the colony that settled at St. Joe's was directly involved in the Chiniquy drama. Most families at St. Anne had followed Chiniquy into the Presbyterian denomination, creating a Protestant majority and a small Catholic minority.<sup>13</sup> This Catholic minority was unhappy with the situation as it was, which motivated in part the migration to Cloud County and settlement at St. Joe's. In this new place, the situation was reversed: there was a strong Catholic majority and much fewer

---

<sup>9</sup> Cyr, "Historic Landscapes."

<sup>10</sup> Roby, "Chiniquy, Charles."

<sup>11</sup> Norma Meier, article in *The Advocate*, Kankakee County, Illinois, 13 November 1980, page 9.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous handwritten historical reminiscence, found in "St. Joseph's" file at Cloud County Historical Society Museum.

<sup>13</sup> Cyr, "Historic Landscapes."

of Chiniquy's Presbyterians.<sup>14</sup> Like in St. Anne, these Catholics followed a policy of isolation, now physically and geographically as well as culturally. Because of this rule of Catholic isolation, I believe it is easier to trace the movements of the small Presbyterian congregation. They had a short-lived church just south of St. Joe's, but this burned down under mysterious circumstances and was never rebuilt.<sup>15</sup> The headstones in the "French Presbyterian Church Cemetery," near to where the church was, show a range of death dates from 1872 to 1896, and a map of townships from 1885<sup>16</sup> shows the cemetery but no church.

The cemetery, with just seven known interments, is very telling in the story of these French Presbyterians. I will analyze each and what they can tell us about the dispersal of the congregation. Alven Barcelo and Ladie Corrine Longuet were infants when they died, and as far as I can tell their last names give no clues to other locations in Kansas to which their families moved. This suggests that the families left Kansas, most likely to return to Kankakee, which was not uncommon among these settlers, who were unprepared for the heat, wind, drought, and grasshoppers that fought to destroy crops.<sup>17</sup> This is an even more likely explanation when we consider that these families were Protestants and would be more comfortable with the Protestant majority that remained in Illinois. Jeffery DeMarteau, died at age 20, also provides little information. Sophie

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Attachment 1. Found in the St. Joseph's file at Cloud County Historical Society Museum; I believe it to be copied from *The Centennial Edition of the History of St. Joseph's Church* by Father Louis S. Mattas and Gladys Charbonneau, 1965.

<sup>17</sup> Meier, *The Advocate*.

Boisvert Dufrain and her family show very typical patterns: according to findagrave.com, Sophie and her husband Henry were born in Quebec, while their four children were born in Kankakee. After Sophie's death in 1896, the family was dispersed far and wide: husband Henry Sr. and oldest son Henry Jr. are interred in Nebraska, son Charles in Oklahoma, son Louis in Miltonvale (still in Cloud County, just south of the site of the French Presbyterian Church), and son Edward in Garden City, Kansas.<sup>18</sup> In the map in Attachment 1, sections of land owned by H. Dufrain, Sr., H. Dufrain, and C. Dufrain can be found just three sections east of the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery. Marcelline Guertain Allain and her family frame an interesting picture. Her husband, Antoine Allain, is interred at Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Concordia.<sup>19</sup> He may have moved into the town between Marcelline's death in 1882 and 1885 since the map in Attachment 1 does not show any land near the Presbyterian Church site owned by an Allain. Their children were spread far across America; the oldest and youngest (Jean Baptiste and Elizear) returned to Kankakee, and others came to be interred in Oregon and Iowa.<sup>20</sup> The oldest daughter, Eliza, married Eli Landry, who is buried in the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery. It is their oldest daughter, Malinda, who married Edward Dufrain (changed to Duftrin) and moved to Garden City, along with her mother (Eliza Allain Landry, obviously after the decease and burial of Eli in Cloud County) and a

---

<sup>18</sup> findagrave.com

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

sister.<sup>21</sup> Eli and Eliza's other children ended up in either Kansas City or Texas.<sup>22</sup> So, to attempt to clear things up: Marcelline Guertain Allain (buried at the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery) was mother-in-law to Eli Landry (also buried there), whose daughter had Sophie Boisvert Dufrain (also buried there) as a mother-in-law.

The last name I arrive at on the list of those interred at the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery is the most interesting. The headstone for Lelly A. Boucher is no longer in this cemetery, but has been moved<sup>23</sup> to Riverdale Cemetery, in Clay County, several sections north and east of the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery. Lelly was just four when she died, but information on her parents and sister may explain what happened to some of the French Presbyterians in the St. Joe's area. Her father, A. Boucher, is shown on the map in Attachment 1 to own a parcel of land several sections south and east of the church site/cemetery. This is in 1885, and Lelly died in 1872, so although I do not believe either of her parents to be buried in Kansas, they did stay in the St. Joe's area for some time. Lelly's sister, Eveline N. Boucher Sauvain, married Julius/Jule Sauvain and is interred at Riverdale Cemetery. Sauvains and Surprenants, who intermarry at at least one point, dominate this cemetery. Jule Sauvain was born in Indiana, and his father, Augustus/August Sauvain, was born in Switzerland.<sup>24</sup> Neither Sauvain nor Surprenant can be found at all in the St. Joe's cemetery, so I believe that

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Apparently since 1985, which is when the list on findagrave.com was compiled for this cemetery. The entry for Lelly A. Boucher also appears on the Riverdale Cemetery list of interments.

<sup>24</sup> findagrave.com



these French-speaking Sauvains (who were Swiss) and Surprenants (who were most likely French) were Protestants; St. Joe's is so close and so large that there is no way they would not have been interred there if they had been Catholic. Therefore, I believe that at least some of Chiniquy's Protestants, such as the Boucher family, found a new French-culture, Protestant community after their French Presbyterian Church in Cloud County



Figure 1: Above: Lelly A. Boucher's headstone where it now rests in Riverdale Cemetery; Lelly was originally interred at French Presbyterian Church Cemetery. Her headstone was the only one in French. It says, "Here rests our dear Lelly A., died October 28, 1872, aged four years, daughter of A. and R. Boucher. She is not lost, she went ahead of us into the Eternal Glory, where we will see each other again."

SOURCE: Author photo, 9 April 2011.



burned down. Rather than rejoin the Catholic church at St. Joe's with their past and present neighbors, they chose to attach themselves to an existing Protestant community.

Because of the size of their community, these Presbyterians could not afford to be as isolated as their Catholic neighbors. Not only do they end up intermarrying with a nearby group of French-speaking settlers, but the headstones at the French Presbyterian Church Cemetery (with the exception of Lelly's) are in English. To me, this says that this small group was more a part of the English-speaking communities around them than the French-speaking Catholic community at St. Joe's. As illustrated in Figure 1, headstones in the St. Joe's Cemetery continue to be inscribed in French until a much later date than the English ones at the Presbyterian Cemetery, which I believe shows how the large community of French Catholics were more isolated and therefore maintained a purely French Canadian culture longer than the small group of French Presbyterians.

However, this did not mean that they were willing to become completely Anglicized.

Near to Riverdale Cemetery is the site of Mulberry Creek Presbyterian Church and the cemetery. This cemetery contains no French names and I can find no connection to our French Presbyterians. One would think that this nearby Presbyterian church would be the logical heir to these Presbyterians with no church, but for at least one family the bonds of Francophone culture proved more strong than those of denomination, but certainly not stronger than the enmity between Chiniquy's Protestants and the traditional French Canadian Catholics. As far as I can discern, none of the Presbyterian families were ever brought back in to the Catholic fold at St. Joe's, despite sharing generations-long heritage with the congregation there. Some preferred to return home to Kankakee, but many

dispersed all over the country rather than renounce Presbyterianism and rejoin the larger French community.



Above: A headstone in the St. Joseph's Cemetery. It is one of many in French, and is from 1895, much later than Lilly's. It says, "Ubalaine Fontaine, wife of C. Girard, M.D., died September 7, 1895, at the age of 24 years, ten months." Because of their isolation, the Catholic of St. Joe's were able to maintain a purely francophone culture longer than the Presbyterians, who were forced to interact with their multicultural surroundings.

## Bibliography

Anonymous handwritten historical reminiscence. As found in "St. Joseph's" file at Cloud

County Historical Society Museum, Concordia, Kansas.

Cyr, John. "Historic Landscapes of Cloud County, Kansas." Master's thesis, Kansas

State University, 1981.

findagrave.com. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?>

[page=gsr&GScid=2371976&CScnty=898&](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gsr&GScid=2371976&CScnty=898&). Accessed 7 May 2011.

Mattas, Louis S. and Gladys Charbonneau. *The Centennial Edition of the History of St.*

*Joseph's Church*. 1965. As found in file at Cloud County Historical Society

Museum, Concordia, Kansas.

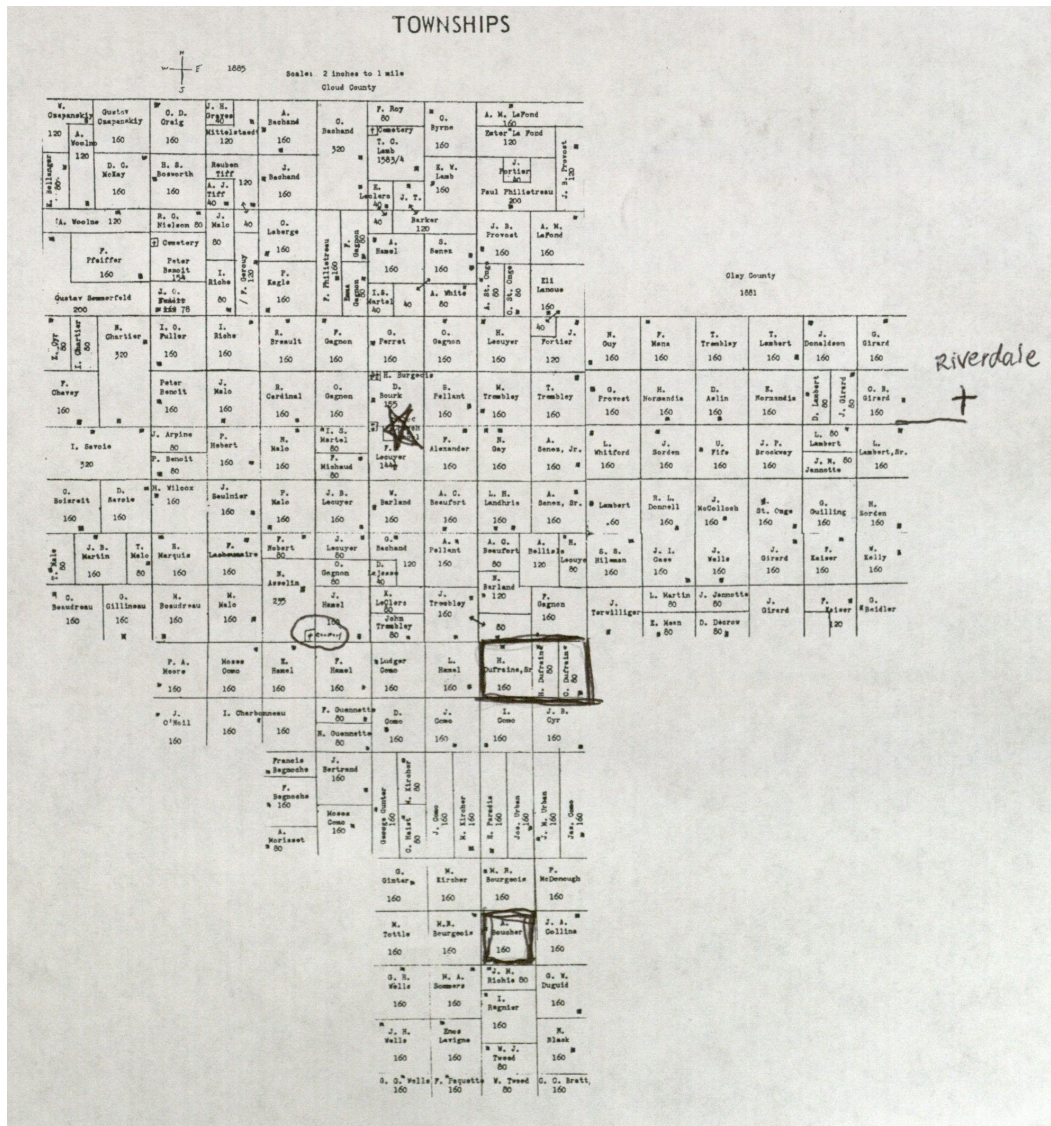
Meier, Norma. Article in *The Advocate*, Kankakee County, Illinois, 13 November 1980,

page 9.

Yves Roby, "Chiniquy, Charles," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (<http://>

[www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=6029](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6029), accessed 9 May 2011).





Attachment 1: The French Presbyterian Church Cemetery and church site is circled and the star is St. Joseph's community/church. The location of Riverdale Cemetery is marked by hand. The Boucher and Dufraime plots are outlined. These are the only names that match those in either Riverdale or the French Presbyterian Church Cemeteries. Note that the date is 1885. SOURCE: St. Joseph's file, Cloud County Historical Society Museum.