

## Étienne Bontron dit Major, from Montussaint

The first *Doubien*<sup>1</sup> who established roots in Canada  
Christian Palvadeau<sup>2</sup> (Christian.palvadeau@doubs.fr)

Translation by Suzanne Boivin Sommerville, FCSHM member (s.sommerville@sbcglobal.net)

### Part 2

Originally published in *Mémoires de la Société généalogique canadienne-française*, volume 57, numéro 3, automne 2006, pp. 195-208, republished in this English translation with permission of the author and of Hélène Lamarche, Editor of *Mémoires*. See *Michigan's Habitant Heritage*, April 2007, for Part 1.

### Other Roots [*souches*] for Bontrons in Franche-Comté

#### The Bontrons of Gouhelans (Doubs)

In addition to the difficulties we faced in locating a trace of the Bontrons in Montussaint, we benefited from following a false trail [in Gouhelans]. Actually, from the beginning, and unavoidably, our eyes were drawn to the Bontrons of Gouhelans, the neighboring village, for which the parish registers go back much further [than the records for Montussaint]. This allowed us to observe that about 1675 (or before), two brothers named Bontron arrived from Savoie. The first, Jacques, had a child with Barbe Peursey in 1676; the second, Louis, had one with Anne Peursey [author's correction of spelling as it appeared in *MSGCF*] in 1680. It was impossible to establish absolutely a link between the Bontrons of Montussaint and those of Gouhelans.

Walking through the cemetery of Rougemont in the spring of 2005, with, at my side, Jean-Marc Major, president of the Association des Major-Bontron d'Amérique (AMBA), and his wife, Louise Malette, secretary of the association, both of them come to participate in research and to serve as a compass [*aiguillon*] for me, we located several Bontron family tombs. Three or four among them were side by side. These, it seems, do not have any connection with the Bontrons of Montussaint. The first Bontron of Rougemont in the parish registers is, in fact, Guérin Bontron of Gouhelans, who gave birth to Léonard in 1697 in Rougemont. The Bontrons at l'Isle-sur-le-Doubs at the beginning of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century also issue from those of Gouhelans.

#### The Bontrons of Gézier (Haute-Saône)

In 1678, a Pierre Bontron married Bernardine Pahu at Besançon, from which marriage were born three children in the parish of Cussey-sur-l'Ognon [*l'Ognon* is a river], specifically in the village of Etuz (Haute-Saône):

- Claude-Joseph, born 1680
- Jeanne-Étiennette, born 1685
- Jacques, born 1687

Already, by 1647, a Savoyard [a man from Savoie], Jacques Noir, had come to establish himself in the village that, in 1654, was made up of only three households [*ménages*]. This was about 20 kilometers to the west of Montussaint but still within the valley of the Ognon [river]. But, one finds in 1711, in the neighboring village of Gézier, the birth of a child to the couple Étienne Euvrard and Jeanne-Étiennette

---

<sup>1</sup> Inhabitant of Doubs, according to its current borders. The *départements* were created a little after the beginning of the French Revolution of 1789, with a few later modifications. [Translator's note: My additions to Palvadeau's text appear within brackets. *Doubs* is pronounced /doo/. Étienne Bontron dit Major and Angélique Proteau are my ancestors. Étienne signed his last name BONTRON, both at Fort Pontchartrain and in the mother colony.]

<sup>2</sup> *Bibliothécaire* [librarian] for children, Médiathèque départementale du Doubs.

Bontron. It would appear we have found a migration of Bontrons toward Gézier. In 1697, there is at Mercey-le-Grand (Doubs), in the same geographic sector, the marriage of a Pierre Bontron with Jeanne Fournier, by whom, in the same year, he sired a daughter named Anne. The godmother was Anne Bontron. In 1708, in Gézier, we find the birth of a daughter to the couple Nicolas Alix and Anne Bontron. In 1699, a Pierre Bontron from Gézier married, at Besançon, Françoise Routier from Cussey-sur-l'Ognon (Doubs). Is he [Pierre] the same as the one who married in 1697? Or is he the same as the one who married in 1678? It is hard to say... [use of ellipsis (...) by the author] Ferréol Bontron was a witness to the 1699 marriage. A Ferréol Bontron, in 1696, had an illegitimate child in the parish of Burgille (Doubs), not far away. In 1709 there can be found, at Gézier, the birth of a child to Ferréol Bontron and Madeleine Routier. At first, [the name of] Pierre Bontron had been written as the father, but this was crossed out and modified. The child died at seven months of age. In 1712, another child, Pierre-Joseph, was born of the same parents; the godfather was Pierre Bontron from Gézier. In 1709, we find, in one act, a godfather who is named Pierre Bontron, son of Ferréol Bontron and of Jeanne Poux. It is certainly possible to go further; I have not yet exhausted this research. Yet, there are no proven connections [at Gézier] with the Bontrons of Montussaint.

There seems to be another source [*souche*, root, for the family] in Charcenne (Haute-Saône), close to Gézier, with the couple Pierre-Marc Bontron and his wife named Mazurier. The children they generated led to the following couples:

- Philibert Jouchoux and Jeanne Bontron, married before 1714
- Michel Bontron and Françoise Bouderot, married before 1722
- François Bontron and Anne Grougnot, married 1726
- Claude-François Bontron and Anne-Antoinette Bouveret, married 1731

Thanks to a baptismal act of 1700, we know that Pierre-Marc Bontron was originally from Gézier, and his wife from Cult. Since I recorded the births of children from the end of 1695 to the end of 1700, the marriage must have taken place in 1695 or earlier.

### **The False Bontrons of Vellexon**

Finally, there is the case at the end of 1728 at Vellexon, a little to the north, that had intrigued us.<sup>3</sup> It concerns a Nicolas Bontron, born about 1699, son of an Antoine Bontron. Was this Antoine a brother of the immigrant [to Montussaint, Claude Bontron, father of Étienne]? Someone, apparently without any reason, had shot at Nicolas, injuring him in his chest, at the base of his stomach, and in both of his arms (the left one was even broken). We quickly located this document thanks to the synopsis [*dépouillement*], unfortunately flawed, of série B. One year later, reexamining the document, we noticed that it was an item that involved not a Bontron but a Boutesson!

### **By Way of Conclusion**

Louise Malette, Jean-Marc Major, and I, not without emotion, climbed the path that led to the small church of Montussaint. In front, there are the three old crosses, called Templar Crosses [*croix templières*], returned to their place there in 1984. Entering the building, we discovered and read the very ancient tombstones, including that of Abraham Sandoz, deceased in 1708 (this must be a son of the first Abraham Sandoz) and that of Jeanne Prudhon, his wife, deceased in 1712. The old cemetery of Montussaint, [at one time] around the church, has not existed since 1972. We tried, without success, to obtain from the mayor, Jean Sandoz, the register of tombs that should have been established when the cemetery disappeared [*lors de la suppression*].

---

<sup>3</sup> ADHS [Archives départementales de la Haute-Saône]: B2876 [Footnote # 31 in original article]

We can say that Étienne Bontron is certainly the oldest [most-distant in time] Doubien to establish roots in Canada. Only two *Comtois* [individuals from Franche-Comté] could, perhaps, be assumed to have preceded him: the presumed *Haut-Saônois* Nicolas Chaput, married in 1689 at Pointe-aux-Trembles, and the presumed *Jurassien* [person from Jura] Robert Rivière, married in 1700 at Saint-Jean, Île-d'Orléans.

Étienne Bontron was still in Franche-Comté in June of 1700; but, between 30 November 1702 and 10 October 1703, he was hospitalized several times at *l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec*. At that time he borrowed the name of his mother because we find him called Étienne Sando [*sic*].<sup>4</sup> His entry into *Hôtel-Dieu* clearly coincided with an important outbreak of smallpox in Québec City. His departure from France must have taken place between June of 1700 and September of 1702. He married on 3 May 1706 at Québec before leaving for Détroit as a soldier in the company of La Forest with the rank of sergeant. Later, he can be found as a simple farmer near Montréal and, to the two children born at Détroit, he would add ten others. In the course of time, numerous descendants would end up adopting as the family name the *dit* name [*surnom*] of their ancestor: Major. Today, it is the *Association des Major-Bontron d'Amérique* who bring to life the memory of their *comtois* ancestor.<sup>5</sup>

### **An Unfinished Story<sup>6</sup>**

A personal question remains: what happened in France to the descendants of the Bontrons of Montussaint? Do any survive? We are currently launched on a brief research project. It is certain that the easier life that might have been obtained by moving to Besançon was an illusion [*leurre*] and the family tree in question is a tree full of dead branches, of lower-class people (most often unstable), and of misery. The family name was transmitted through the descendants of Pierre, the shoemaker of the fourth generation. He had two shoemaker sons: Antoine (1769-1800) and Claude-Antoine (1778 - after 1835). These two would not have the advantages of their ancestors because they were illiterate.

### **First Branch**

The first child of Antoine, Germaine (1790-1871), orphaned of father and mother at thirteen years of age, had four natural children, which leaves us somewhat blocked [in our research]. In 1823, Germaine gave birth to a daughter without the assistance of a doctor or a midwife. In 1829, she lived at the hospice of Bellevaux, where she probably gave birth because Bellevaux served as a maternity hospital for the poor. For a while, her situation improved somewhat, thanks to a marriage contracted with Jean Brunner, a carpenter and merchant of knitwear and *lingerie* [*bonnetier*; *lingerie* here does not have the modern meaning of undergarments for ladies]. Widowed, she subsisted by living with one of her natural sons, François (1819-1889), thanks to the benefits granted to help the indigent. At her death, François was able to end his days at the asylum of the *Petites soeurs des pauvres* [Little Sisters of the Poor].

His brother, Charles-Auguste (1829-1883), a maker of braces and plaster casts [*ressorts puis plâtrier*], would carry the name Bontrond [*sic*] and would pass it on to the eighth generation, *à la bagatelle* [generously] through nine sons. The continued existence [*la pérennité*] of the name was nevertheless not guaranteed. Six sons did not reach the age of three years. In 1897, another of his sons, a soldier [*engagé volontaire*, enlisted man], died from an illness in the infirmary of Miarinarivo (Madagascar). Already

---

<sup>4</sup> Information sent by PRÉFEN (Programme de Recherche sur l'Émigration des Français en Nouvelle-France) at Caen. [Footnote 32]

<sup>5</sup> This article is a version revised and expanded from the one that appeared in *L'Estafette* (vol. 4, n° 2 of July 2005), bulletin of the Association des Major-Bontron d'Amérique. [Footnote 33]

<sup>6</sup> This last part is based essentially on the acts of the civil State [*état civil*] copiously consulted at the *Bibliothèque municipale d'étude et de conservation de Besançon*. [Footnote 34]

Florimont (1811-1834), his uncle, another natural son of Germaine, had died from cholera, at twenty-three years of age, in a military hospital in Oran (Algeria).



Photo: famille Bontrond, Île-de-France

Mariage de Jean-Alfred Bontrond (1880-1933), en 1913.

On note au premier rang, la presence de son frère Claude-Antoine Bontrond (1859-1930).

[Marriage of Jean-Alfred Bontrond (1880-1933, in 1913. In the first row can be seen the presence of his brother Claude-Antoine Bontrond (1859-1930).]

Claude Antoine (1859-1930), the eldest, a *carrossier* by profession [repairer of automobiles that have had accidents], married in 1885 at Besançon but established himself at Montbéliard and at Paris, where he was a teacher of gymnastics. His two eldest sons, Narcisse-Edmond-René (1886-1914) and Gabriel-Joseph-Hilaire (1887-1916), were devoured by the War of 1914-1918.<sup>7</sup> Narcisse, an architect, nevertheless had the time to marry in Paris, four months before dying. The family dispersed while maintaining a temporary home in Doubs, at Marchaux, *commune* of the birth of the wife of Claude-Antoine. Narcisse had a posthumous son in 1915, whose two sons (at the eleventh generation) would leave Paris to travel, in 1975, to establish themselves at Moncey, near Marchaux, where, as children they had gone to tease [*taquiner*] the fish. One of the two [sons] has since left the village for the South of France. There are no male bearers of the name Bontron at the thirteenth generation, but it is hoped to have one or two [born] in the coming years.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/](http://www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/) and their birth records. [Footnote 35]

The youngest of the nine brothers, Jean-Alfred (1880-1933), married a German woman in Paris in 1913 (he was already an inhabitant at Courbevoie in 1907). During the war of 1914-1918, he escaped death [in combat] thanks to his height. In fact, measuring only one meter forty-six, he served, being too short [for the regular troops], in a division [*section*] of nurses [*infirmiers*].<sup>8</sup> He continued in this work after the war. On 31 March 1933, at six thirty in the morning, an employee of *l'hôpital Cochin* discovered, in a basement room, the cadaver of chief orderly [*surveillant chef*] Jean-Alfred Bontrond [*sic*]. Jean-Alfred, the previous afternoon, had received his monthly salary [*appointments*]. He was assassinated for his money. Edmond Egasse was condemned to death for the crime. As he [his name] cannot be found in the list of 395 heads chopped off [*tranchées*] by Anatole Deibler,<sup>9</sup> we can suppose that his condemnation was commuted [*commuée*] to a sentence of forced labor in perpetuity. But Jean-Alfred had a son at the ninth generation... [author's use of ellipsis] And there are six young men named Bontrond [*sic*] at the eleventh generation, and the first has arrived at the twelfth generation. Others may follow. The family is located in the *départements* of Yvelines, Seine-et-Marne and Hauts-de-Seine.

## Second Branch

Descending from Claude-Antoine (born 1778), we find at the eighth generation, Joseph (born 1844), cutter of files [*tailleur de limes*], a natural son recognized by Pierre-Claude (1822-1884) and Marie-Anne Blaise, his Austrian mother. Joseph, after a marriage at Besançon in 1865, remarried in Paris in 1901 at the age of fifty-six. Pierre-Claude had a first cousin, Louis-Jean-Baptiste (born 1850), son of Jean-Antoine (born 1814), shoemaker. We lose trace of Joseph and Louis-Jean-Baptiste shortly after the marriage of the first and the military service of the second.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, they do not appear on the electoral lists for Besançon.

This rapid survey of descendants does not pretend to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, it is improbable that any branches [*des rameaux*] grew elsewhere and persist to today.

From Savoie to Montussaint, from Montussaint to Québec and Besançon; from Besançon to Montbéliard, from Besançon and Montbéliard to Paris; and then a small remnant [*amorce*] that returned to Franche-Comté—these are the centuries of history and migration that took place on both sides of the Atlantic concerning some Bontronds in France (where the name was standardized with a final /d/, and the many Majors of Canada, descendants of Claude Bontron and Blaise Sandoz.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Québec City [1608-2008], it is possible that a commemorative plaque in the name of Étienne Bontron *dit* Major will be placed in the village of Montussaint. We will, in any event, promote one.

I wish to thank here the Bontronds of Île-de-France and those of Franche-Comté for their help in understanding their family history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and for the kindness with which the former were so willing to send me information (as well as the photograph of the marriage of Jean-Alfred) and, by the latter, to meet with me and show me the documents they possess. I must also thank Daniel Paget of the *Archives départementales de Doubs*, whose suggestions and helpfulness [*coups de main*] will always be precious to me.

**Besançon (Doubs) Franche-Comté**

christian.palvadeau@doubs.fr

---

<sup>8</sup> ADD [Archives départementales du Doubs]: *registre matricule* (Besançon): classe 1900 n° 829. [Footnote 36]

<sup>9</sup> Anatole Deibler (1883-1939), chief executioner of criminal judgments [*arrêts criminels*] of France. He executed 395 individuals condemned to death, 299 of them as chief executioner. [Footnote 37]

<sup>10</sup> *Bibliothèque municipale d'étude et de conservation*: 1h152. Extract of births for 1850 at Besançon (*classe* 1870). [Footnote 38]