FROM GREZ-DOICEAU TO WISCONSIN

INTRODUCTION

When trying to examine the Brabant population migration to the United States in the middle of the 19th Century, we ought to inquire about the reasons for such a massive move at this particular time, why they left their little villages, and why they sold every belonging in order to emigrate overseas. We won't systematically explain all the special reasons for the move, but we will try to outline the general reasons that emigration proved to be the ultimate solution for hundreds of families. Our first objective will be to describe the population growth and the socio-economical context of Belgium and Brabant Wallon.

The 18th century was marked by the Austrian presence in Belgium, then came the French Revolution which shows Belgian provinces annexed to France. In 1815, these provinces were under Netherland's domination. In 1830, the Belgian Revolution brought independence to our nine provinces. Brussels became the capital of this new country. Brabant Wallon, from where most emigrees departed, is situated south of Brussels, a region between Nivelles, Jodoigne, Wavre and Gembloux. The "Hesbaye Namuroise" is situated south of Brabant Wallon, from Fleurus to Hannut and Gembloux to Namur. Combined, these two regions have a diameter of 25 miles. They still represent the best and richest soil of Belgium. We raise corn, wheat and sugar beets on large rolling landscapes; sometimes bisected by a woods or a village concentrated around the church. Farm buildings are shaped in a square form and houses are old, sometimes overgrown with wisteria. It's from this country-side, mostly well-known for its generous soil and rich pastures, that several generations of "Brabançons" left for the United States, taking with them their courage, their traditions and their know-how, and keeping in their hearts the vivid image of a small chapel and linden tree or of winter muddy paths or even of a sunny July day bursting with warm colors of red poppies, blue bluets and yellow, ripe wheat waving under a light hot wind.
OVERPOPULATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The growth of population during the first part of the 19th century is shown by the difference in the total number of births and the total number of deaths. If births are more numerous than deaths, the population number grows. In reverse, if deaths are more numerous than births, the population number decreases. Until the mid-18th century, periods of growth, of stagnation and of decreases came rapidly one after the other. If births became more numerous than deaths, an epidemic, a war or starvation reduced the number.

Death was everywhere. Out of four children under 7 years old, only one could survive. When older, these children remained unmarried. It was often seen that one out of two single young men or women would never marry. A woman's fertility, following the laws of nature, could provide in normal circumstances a family of eight children. If birth or early-age mortality or widowing hadn't been so common, the population would have been higher.

So, people of the Old Regime were dependent on nature and its caprices and wouldn't fight against fate. Beginning in the second part of 18th century, the population started to grow. Starvation, epidemics and wars decreased and all positive elements helped the growth of population to become a real blessing. All numbers and data show it. For the first time, the Belgian population was fastly growing, particularly the Brabant population. In the 1784 records, the number of inhabitants of Grez-Doiceau and surrounding hamlets exceeded 1200! Population growth, a capitalistic system starting and an industrial revolution beginning in the Sambre Valley next to Charleroi and in the Meuse Valley around Liege provoked deep and important changes. Not only in cities but also in the countryside, rural habits had to be adapted. Ancestral procedures such as fallows and common grazing lands were forgotten for better and easier ways. Green pastures replaced fallows. Potatoes were introduced at that time. This vegetable had two positive effects: potatoes offered a food diversification and bettered the soil productivity. Then, around Namur, a trial was attempted to increase the yield in order to feed the growing population. The common properties were put up for sale. We already can forsee a population growth beginning in the second part of 18th century, resulting in overpopulation together with a farming revolution and an economical change. The number of births during the last decade of 18th century was particulary high despite both the famine of 1794 and the French occupation.

Twenty five years later at the establishment of the Dutch Regime in 1815, the total number of marriages was increasing until around 1820. During the following decades, population growth reached its highest level: a rate of 50 per cent between 1820 and 1845. This phenomenon is more important in cities or in industrial communities but effects were felt in little villages as well. We ought to explain now the industrial revolution and its effects on farming. Until the end of
the Old Regime, Belgian industry was mostly based on farming production, textile manufacturing in the Flemish area, and the iron industry south of Sambre and Meuse Valleys. From this proto-industrialization derived all kinds of other activities, for example, there were lace and linen workers in Flanders, nailmakers, gunsmiths and wooden shoemakers in Wallonie.

In Brabant, the country spirit of Wavre, Perwez and Jodoigne provided several different and farm-connected jobs. Linen and cotton weaving was very popular. We could find distilleries, breweries, wheat-mills, paper-mills and even a vinegar plant. In Grez-Doiceau itself, one could work in the pinning-mill built in 1827, with the bricks of an old nail-factory, or even work in a wheat-mill or a paper-mill. There were two breweries, a chicory factory, and even a chalk extraction plant. In the first population record of the community in 1846, we find 9 weavers, 15 clothmakers, 7 seamstresses, 4 paper-mill employees, and 1 chalk-maker. In these country factories and home-factories, workers were mainly countrymen whose work provided a second and substantial salary. The pluralism of farming and factory activities could take four different forms:

1. Factory worker employed in a plant and owning both a small piece of land and a cow;
2. Combination of industrial activities derived directly from farming (the raw material being bought or coming from the farm and transformed by the farmer himself);
3. Seasoned-workers on farms during the busy period who worked in the winter-time in small factories (knife-makers, nail-smiths);
4. The most encountered type of situation is the one consisting of dividing the family members into two categories: one working on the farm, the second working in factories.

This proto-industrialization, the population growth, new technical and motorized systems, iron and chemical procedures coming from surrounding countries, a new generation believing in the capitalist ideas, were the best conditions for the development and the birth of an enormous industrial revolution unseen thus far.

A few years after 1820, thanks to the Netherlands government and our independant representatives, the iron industry grew in Liège and Charleroi. We had iron and coal. These industries were located along canals and rivers. Highways were built in 1830 and railways provided in 1840 the necessary infrastructures to improve this brand new industry.

Industrialization was a new era but urbanization followed. That fast-growing industrialization created a need for a greater and greater work force. Nailsmiths were the first to be hired in the new factories, especially around Charleroi. Then came
large numbers of laborers from the Meuse and Sambre valleys. These workers were in search of a job such as they used to find in their own little villages. So far as Brabant Wallon and Hesbaye Namuroise are concerned, few left their farms and rich lands for factories.

Nevertheless, the population was growing in unseen proportions, so that we could count in Grez-Doiceau and surrounding hamlets, 2190 inhabitants in 1831 and 2839 in 1846. The generations between 1820 and 1830 brought such an important growth, not outside immigration as we used to think before.

A problem came when Grez Doiceau couldn't feed and give work to all their community members. They couldn't increase the yield but did increase their farming area. Yield couldn't drastically change since fertilizers did not appear until the late 19th century. How could they adapt their farming ways to satisfy their needs? Areas were increased thanks to good will and work. Every parcel, every corner or every piece of ground was plowed, worked and sown so that the landscapes as recorded in the 1846 books, seemed to look like an enormous field. Since that time, woods, pastures and buildings have modified the Brabant landscape. This was, then, a temporary answer and solution to the fast growing population. However, saturation came fast and was helped by the 1846 events.
1846, END OF POPULATION GROWTH

The Winter of 1844-45 had been rough, agriculture suffered and was replaced by potato fields. At the end of July, Flemish farmers discovered the symptoms of infestation of Phytophthora. The crops were destroyed and the potatoes were all rotten. Almost all European countries encountered the same problem. In the fall of 1845, Belgian production decreased: from 850 million tons to 110: a reduction of 85 per cent. The yield factor for a "hectare" (2 1/2 acres) diminished to a factor of 12 or even 13 in Flanders, Namur and Luxembourg provinces.

The market reactions were immediate. Potato prices in August of 1845 doubled in December. Potatoes were three times more expensive in 1845 than in 1844. The vegetable had become the basic food of farmers and the factory workers. This brought confusion among the people. Turnips replaced potatoes on most family tables and some day-laborers worked for their everyday food. Consequently, grain prices went up too. The weather early in 1846 didn't help the situation. The combination of late frosts and a hot and dry Summer reduced the grain yields. Even a better potato production could never balance the food needs. In order to fight the potato blight, farmers had been asked to reduce their production. This advice had not been followed, and we even noticed a 30% increase in production in 10 years. Consequently, it took 10 years to suppress the disease. The years 1848, 1850 to 1852 and 1854 showed a 50% shortage.

We did not have a good yield until 1856, which was about three-fourths of the harvest before the disease appeared. Wheat and rye gave some trouble too, especially in 1855 when the harvest price decreased one-third. Prices of food fluctuated a lot between 1846 and 1847 and the years 1853 and 1855. One can easily imagine how the poorer classes of people suffered deprivations. On the other side, big farmers and landowners became richer. Moreover, many persons died in the cholera epidemic of 1848.

A vast change was taking place: a crisis developed, affecting the old industrial ways of production used in the rural areas. The development of communication systems and urbanization was beginning to kill home factories and even country factories.

Independants and small business couldn't compete with big factories since new technology was expensive. Home enterprises such as weaving progressively disappeared, followed by distilleries, sugar mills, flour mills, gunsmiths, cutlery and hatter shops. Most of the small country activities gave way to important and well-equipped factories. Consequently, all Brabant Wallon and Hesbaye Namuroise areas were severely affected by the vast changes which were destroying the country's economy.
Thanks to new railways and highways, most villages had access to a new and diversified universe; nothing could be as it was before.

Around 1850, the conditions were right for a massive country exodus, which depopulated many areas during almost an entire century in the Brabant Wallon, the Hesbaye Namuroise, as well as the Condroz, the Ardennes, the Sambre et Meuse Valleys areas and East Hainaut.

The first phase of the crisis did not provoke the emigration. The number of emigrations during the years of 1846 and 1847 stayed low... the population of Grez Doiceau, less than 3000 people in the 1846 census, the one of the Brabant Wallon and the one of the Hesbaye Namuroise held on in a deeply shaken subsistence economy. They were hoping for the end of the potato blight.

The enhancement of the crisis during the years 1852 and 1855 paved irreversibly the way for a strong rural exodus. During the year 1852, a few adventurers left: 15 made their way to the Capital, 5 others chose Charleroi and its industrialisation and two families decided to go to the Unites States:

- Ambroise DEGODT (41), a weaver, living in Doiceau, his second wife, Marie Louise FERON (28) and their six children: Jean Joseph (20), Marie Catherine (15), Marie Gudule (12), Marie Joséphine (10) all from the first marriage, Rachel (5) and Norbert Robert (3) from the second marriage.

- Alexandre LEURQUIN (38), also a weaver, living in Gastuche, his wife, Eléonore GASTUCHE (38) and their son Jean Baptiste (9).

To explain the beginning of the emigration to America, we have to take into account the severity of the economic crisis but also demographic effect due to the population boom during the years 1820 to 1830: this generation arrived at the age of marriage, facing enormous difficulties in order to build a family. They were unable to procure work in their own village and the only way was to leave it.

So, in the year 1852, three elements were present to justify this emigration:
- an attractive region, the United States of America,
- a repulsive region, the Brabant Wallon and also the Hesbaye Namuroise,
- a indispensable link between the two countries under the form of ship transportation but also with an important circulation of information about this potential emigration...

Then the emigration current was established and, at the end of the century, approximatively 5000 Brabançons and Namurois took this way opened by the families DEGODT and LEURQUIN.
QUINNEBAUG PIONEERS

What were the different causes that stimulated the emigration phenomenon in 1853? The economic crisis is important, but it cannot justify such a massive move. Our oral tradition proposes several explanations. Even though the LEURQUIN AND DEGODT families don't possess any written documents, the main reason for the first move seems linked to François PETINIO. Who was he? His real name was Constant François PETINIO, born the 25th of April 1788 in Roux Miroir and married to Marie Antoinette PERA the 22nd of June 1833 in Héron. They had a son called François Constant, born in Héron the 3rd of September 1832.

All details gathered about PETINIO make us think that he was a private guardian in Grez Doiceau, despite the fact that neither his name nor his son's can be found in the Grez Doiceau population register between 1847 and 1853, the departure date of PETINIO.

Tradition tells the story of PETINIO coming back from Antwerp with a brochure which encouraged departure to the United States but nothing is certain since the emigration story written by Xavier MARTIN did not mention it at all. We are sure that François PETINIO had a tremendous role in the first emigration wave. He was the eldest of the group, Joseph MARTIN being 18 years younger than PETINIO.

The second element in the emigration process was the position held by recruiting officers. Adolphe STRAUSS did not hesitate to scour the Brabant countryside to gather emigration candidates in order to fill departing ships in Antwerp. Brochures had been published and ads put in local newspapers such as"La Gazette de Jodoigne". Decisions were made shortly after reading them. The DPAQUE family left Doiceau on May the 12th, as well as the family of Joseph MARTIN. On May the 6th, the BODART family left its house in Gastuche and the MOREAU family left Grez on May the 11th.

After waiting three days in Antwerp, the journey began with the old American three-masted ship called the QUINNEBAUG. That ship left on May the 17th. Its captain, Mr. JENKINS, had the mission to lead the 180 passengers to the U.S. Among them, 81 persons originated from Brabant, the others were from Holland. No wonder, between 1840 and 1860, 15 Hollanders out of 1000 decided on overseas emigration. Here follows the detailed composition of the pioneers families:

1. Lambert BODART (24), a day laborer in a papermill, living in Gastuche, his wife Marie Célestine WOLPUT (22), their daughter Marie Euphrasie (10 months) and Lambert's mother Jeanne LAMEBAEU (59), widow.
2. Etienne DETIENNE (28), a stonemason, living in Biez, a nextdoor commune of Grez, his wife Thérèse (25), and their two children Jean Philippe (3) and Joséphine (5 months).

3. Jean Baptiste DETIENNE (25), a stonemason, living in Biez; he was single and probably related to Etienne.

4. Jean Joseph DOYEN (35), a farm laborer, living in Hèze, his wife Marie Antoinette MOUREAU (36) and their five children Hubert (13), Jean (11), Thérèse (7), Joséphine (3) and François (5 months).

5. Louis GASTUCHE (52), a stonemason, living in Doiceau, single.

6. Jean François HANNON (44), a day laborer stonemason, living in Bonlez, his wife Jeanne Mélanie BOUCHER (42), and their four children Joseph (16), Adèle (13), David (9) and François (5).

7. Philippe HANNON (38), a day laborer stonemason, living in Royenne, his wife Anne Joseph EVRARD (29) and their three children Éléonore (9), Jean Baptiste (5) and Marie Barbe (6 months).

8. Joseph HAULOTTE (30), a joiner, living in Bonlez, single.

9. Guillaume HORKMANS (23), a barber, living in Weert-Saint-Georges, his wife Thérèse (27) and their daughter Virginia (11 months).

10. Joseph Jacques HUISDENS (34), a locksmith, his brother Joseph Désiré (19), farmer, and his sister Marie (24).

11. Jean Joseph JOSSART (23), a farmer, single, living in Royenne.

12. Jean Baptiste MARICQ (33), a joiner, living in Bayarmont, his wife Hortense DENIS (27) and their four children Philomène (8), Grégoire (5), Joseph (2) and Jean François (5 months).

13. Joseph MARTIN (47), a bricklayer, living in Doiceau, his wife Henriette BASSINE (47) and their six children: Xavier (20)(more will be said about him later), Désiré (14), Éléonore (11), Alexandre (7), Elie (5) and Céline (11 months).

14. Adrien MASSY (26), a farm laborer, living in Doiceau, single.

15. Jean Baptiste MASSY (39), a stonemason, living in Doiceau, his wife Anne GASTUCHE (44) and their three children: Clément (6), Polydore (3) and Thérèse Marie (7 months).
16. JOSEPH MOREAU (31), a farm laborer, living in Doiceau, his wife Anne RALET (25) and their two daughters Marie Joséphine (3) and Claire (9 months).

17. Béroni NELIS (23), a stonecutter, probably living in Biez and single.

18. Martin PAQUES (34), a farmer living in Doiceau, his wife Marie Thérèse RALET (40) and their four children: Antoine (18), Anne (12), Alphonse (10) and Xavier (8).

19. Constant François PETINIOT (65), a farmer, widower and his son Constant (20).

20. Gaspart Joseph RENGLET (41), a shoemaker, his wife Marie Philippine (45) and their two children Gérard (19) and Marie Joséphine (10).

21. Jean Baptiste SWILLE (46), a farmer, living in Grez, his wife Elisabeth VAN DRIESS (43) and their five children: Mélanie (19), Marie (17), Léonie (5), Gille (3) and Louis (6 months).

22. Pierre VANDENBOSCH (22), a baker, living in Weurt-Saint-Georges, single.

So, the QUINNAUG passengers were composed of Gréziens coming from the hamlets of Grez, Doiceau, Royenne, Hèze, Gastuche and Bayarmont; a total number of 55 Gréziens from 12 households: 9 families and 3 single persons. We need to add the two PETINIOT members who probably lived in Grez and also families living in Biez and Weurt-Saint-Georges. These first Grez Doiceau pioneers represented one third of the total ship's passengers. That massive move out of the Grez Doiceau village seems to be the result of much discussion since this decision was irreversible. Contacts were made with Antwerp shipowners. Each adult had to pay 120 francs. Therefore, they sold their properties, houses, lands, fields, horses (if any) and tools. Most of the time, the sale money covered their ticket price and some extra to start again in the New World. However, some of them could only cover the seacrossing expenses. Emigration was their last chance, knowing there was no possibility of returning. They had to believe in it!

The journey was perilous and long, almost fifty days, which caused starvation and sickness. A Holland boy and the youngest MARICQ child, Jean François, 5 months old, died on the ship. Later, letters to Belgium will explain the many troubles and difficulties our Brabançons had to face on their way to the United States; not only because of bad weather conditions but mostly because of the shipowners carelessness, which caused many protests. A report was made in Philadelphia in October of 1854 telling about drastic food limitations during the journey. Water was sometimes so red and thick that they could not drink it as it
was bilge water while seamen got fresh water kept on the deck. If by any chance a child tried to get a drop of it, the poor creature was beaten almost to death. Passengers had to pay the cook to get scraps from the captain's table. For example, the PAQUES family spent 26 francs for food. Despite it, they were weak and exhausted, they could not walk without help. The MARTIN family members experienced the same misfortune: Only those who had some money could survive decently. The others had to do with one cookie a day. Complaints against STRAUSS, the shipowner, were so numerous that had he been there on the ship, passengers would have thrown him overboard. As you can easily imagine, our pioneers were aggravated on their arrival in New York and their spirits were at the lowest.
SEARCH FOR A NEW HOMELAND

Our 80 pioneers arrived in New York, July the 6th. A border checklist of the New York district has been found, giving us the official namelist, with age and profession: middle-aged persons, farmers, stoncutters, joiners and other professions. Under the immigrant nationality title, 107 show "Holland" including the MARTIN family of Doiceau, and 73 show "France". This proves well that it was not customary at all to receive Belgian immigrants.

None of the immigrants knew for sure in which state he or she would settle, even though J. THIELENS had published in 1850 a brochure called "Guide et conseiller de l’émigrant" describing the climate, facilities, soil fertility and how to buy land. During their long journey, the emigrants debated long hours and finally decided that Wisconsin would suit them best considering its weather, its landscape, and its farming possibilities, its abundant fresh water. It seemed paradise on earth in comparison with the bad economical situation in Europe during the 19th century.

We think however that Dutch emigrants influenced our pioneers into their decision. These Dutch had to join countrymen who were already settled in Wisconsin, north of Milwaukee, in the Sheboygan area. The Gréziens followed the Dutch emigrants to Wisconsin.

Two large families, MARTIN and PAQUES were not able to travel with other colony members. It's easy to understand that they could probably not gather enough money to cover the entire trip to Wisconsin. Moreover, their expenses on the ship had been taken into account. In fact, besides 120 francs needed for the ship between Antwerp and New York, they still needed 100 to 150 francs to travel between New York and Wisconsin itself. Beyond this, they would have to buy land to settle on as well as food to survive the wintertime until the first harvest. Both families probably settled for a time in Philadelphia, joining the DEGODT family who arrived in October 1852. A few years later, the three families moved to Wisconsin, leaving Xavier MARTIN who wanted to improve his English language. He stayed in Philadelphia until 1857 and played the important role of interpreter for the new immigrants in the multi-national society of the New World. He also tried to keep alive traditions and principles deeply held by our pioneers, keeping the identity that we still can feel nowadays.

Except for the MARTINS and PAQUES, the Brabançon pioneers, essentially composed of the remaining 41 Gréziens, followed their homeland neighbors to Wisconsin. They probably took the Albany-Buffalo road, crossing over Lake Erie to Detroit and taking the train to St. Joseph on Lake Michigan. They still would have to cross the lake to reach Milwaukee. They arrived there at the end of July. They chose a place in Sheboygan, mostly occupied by Dutch pioneers. Relationships with the Dutch deteriorated fast because of language differences. They
luckily met a French-speaking immigrant who told them that in the Green Bay area, the language was mostly French and that climate and soil fertility was the same there. So, in mid-August, Brabant immigrants left Sheboygan for Green Bay where they met with French Canadians. This new location suited them best, so the men started their search for farming lands. They found available lands along the Fox River next to Kaukauna, 20 miles south of Green Bay, presently between Appleton and Wrightstown.

This would have been the end of our pioneers' story if chance had not decided otherwise. One of Philippe HANNON's children died. It was probably the youngest one, Marie Barbe, born in Grez Doiceau in 1852. She was buried from St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Green Bay. Father Edouard DAEMS, a Croisier born in Schaffen next to Diest in Belgium, was visiting with the French Catholic priest PERRODIN at the same moment of the HANNON child's burial. Father DAEMS was in charge of the Bay Settlement parish, situated northeast of Green Bay. One can easily imagine the joy and surprise caused by such a fortunate meeting. Father DAEMS and the Brabançon pioneers exchanged news and advice. The priest gained the pioneers' trust and suggested to them that they settle northeast of the town, close to the Peninsula forest. He showed them the way and helped each of them buy forty to eighty acres of forest which was government lands sold at a very low price ($1.25 an acre). So, we can now explain the triangular disposition of the Belgian settlement between Bay Settlement, Sturgeon Bay and Algoma, in three different counties: Door County, Brown County and Kewaunee County. This is how chance contributed to the establishment of the Belgian pioneers. We still can find nowadays placenames such as "Aux Premiers Belges" (Champion), Thiry Daems, Brussels, Rosière, Grand Leez (Lincoln), Walhain, Martinville (Robinsonville), and Namur.

EMIGRATION GOES ON

The first QUINNEBAUG contingent will soon be followed by many others. We know for sure that six families and one single person embarked before winter to the United States.

The three following families left Grez Doiceau in September:
1. Jean François BIDOU (34), day-laborer, living in Gastuche, his wife Marie Antoinette MARTIN (41) and their four children: Sophie (11), Constance Sidonie (6), Jean Baptiste (4) and Jean Christophe (2).
2. Jean DEKEUSTER (49), widower, farmer, living in Royenne and his son Joseph (22).
3. Pétronille CORAIL (33), living in Royenne, and her daughter Marie Thérèse (12).
In October, another family and one single man left for the New World:

1. Jean Baptiste HANNON (22), joiner, living in Royenne, his wife Marie Barbe JOSSART (21) and their daughter Marie Thérèse (2 months).
2. Célestin THIRY (18), single, living in Grez.

In mid-November, two other families followed:

1. Pierre Joseph BODART (50), day-laborer, living in Gastuche, his wife Marie Louise DOYEN (56) and their six children: Marie Louise (25), Guillaume (22), Jean Baptiste (19), Marie Thérèse (16), Isabelle Stéphanie (12) and Désiré Modeste (10).
2. Jean Baptiste NELIS (50), weaver, living in Doiceau, his wife Elisabeth Eleonore BODART (52) and their six children: Jean Philippe (21), Octavie Eléonore (14), Bernard Antoine (8) and Marie Elisabeth (5).

These 31 emigrants plus the 55 QUINNEBAUG pioneers formed a troupe of 86 Gréziens on American ground.

In 1854, 42 others Gréziens took the same way: in February, the families of François FORVILLY, Jean Baptiste EVRAETS and Catherine LAGNAUX-DERIDDER; in March, the families of Jean Baptiste VINCENT and Martin DANDOIT; in May, the family of Louis Joseph JOSSART. In September other families also went overseas.

The two following years, the move was amplified, especially in 1855, when 174 departures were recorded, amongst them 88 during April. In 1856, there were 99 inscriptions in March, one in April. In 1857, the move decreased and only one person left in May: Pierre DESTECHE (30). The last family left in 1858: Pierre ROBERT (32), his wife Antoinette DELVAUX (34) and their three children; Joséphine (17), Alexandre (14) and Marie Zénâire (11 months). In summary, for 7 years (1852-1858), 425 Brabançons left their homeland for the New World; the years 1855 and 1856 having the higher records of departure and 1857 being the last year showing a sudden decrease.

**CONTEXT OF THIS SHORT-LIVED PHENOMENON**

Let's describe now the causes of such an extraordinary overseas move and its sudden stop in 1857. At first, why such an extension of departures? Antwerp shipowners organized a recruiting campaign with the help of recruiting officers whose territory extended to Brabant and the surrounding areas. J.B. MATHOT, mayor of Grand-Leez was a recruiting officer for STRECKER, KLEIN and STOCK, shipowners. Some emigrants working for Wisconsin landowners came back to
Belgium and became active recruiting officers too, such as J.J. STREYCKMAN, who originated from Walhain-Saint-Paul. A. PONCELET, Consul of Belgium in Chicago wrote about him:

"Since he left for Belgium, I heard his main preoccupation was recruiting and advertising for a society of Green Bay. He would have received a free passage back home. His wife and children got their travel expenses paid since he recruited about 250 passengers for Mr. STRAUSS' company. Besides, he received five francs for each passenger he could recruit."

The officers' wages depended on the total number of emigration contracts signed. This type of activity caused many complaints and created frauds. Mr. A. PONCELET sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Office of Belgium telling him about the illegal and fraudulent STRAUSS activities: "Not a single day passes away without receiving a complaint about the STRAUSS company. Each emigrant who has signed a contract with him, has a thousand recriminations. Can you help stop this impossible situation?"

The most usual way used by recruiting officers, in order to lure potential candidates, was the publishing of false letters, describing an easy life and wrong situations in the New World. One can read in Charles LHOST's letter to his mother dated October the 1st 1855:

"The second time I wrote you, there were many lies; the person who wrote it was a debauchee in America."

In Eghezée and Gembloux, some recruiting officers paid by Antwerp shipowners, read false letters right after Sunday mass. These magnificent stories tempted the more adventurous and foolish persons.

Emigration to the United States became more and more important and caused debates among Belgian official representatives. On May the 9th 1854, the Chamber of Representatives discussed the emigration and what role the Belgian Government should play in that phenomenon. Some thought the State should encourage and organize emigration; others, the majority of them, thought that a moderate intervention would be best. A concensus in favor of spontaneous emigration with little intervention by the State was seen.

The Belgian Consuls in the New World were the main characters in the battle against fraud and illegal activities in relation to emigration. They kept the Minister of The Foreign Office informed but also went into local Belgian settlements, trying to found out how immigrants organized their lives, which situations or difficulties they had to face. Sometimes what they found in the local press was beyond all imagination. A. PONCELET sent an article out of a Green Bay newspaper dated January the 30th:

"We have been informed last week that some Belgian immigrants who settled near Red River, 20 miles north of Green Bay were living in sheer misery, lacking food, clothes and the necessities of life. Their houses, better called huts, built out
of wood cannot protect them from the wind and snow. They are almost starving to
death and are in danger of death because of the cold weather."

The Belgian Government did not want to take an active part in the emigration
move and did not wish to interfere with the wealthy economic life of the port of
Antwerp nor in the most important emigration companies. All that the Belgian
Government "could" do was a counselling type of activity to emigrants, denouncing
the illegal practices and publishing the Consuls' reports about how to face
difficulties or how to try to avoid them.

During the years 1855 and 1856, local Belgian authorities were worried about
the disastrous depopulation. On July the 17th 1855, the "Conseil Provincial du
Brabant" declared:

"... almost everywhere, in Jodoigne, Wavre and Perwez cantons, emigration
is reaching high proportions."

The following year, the "Commissaire" of the district of Nivelles described
emigration to the U.S. as a "real fever" or partial depopulation.

On April the 7th 1856, a Chamber Representative related the fact that Mont-
Saint-Guibert inhabitants wrote a petition in order to alert the authorities about the
fastmoving and frightening emigration to the New World.

Three elements contributed to the emigration decrease: the denunciation of
illegal recruiting ways, Consul's advice and reports and disastrous depopulation
pointed out by local authorities.

Moreover, the socio-economic situation became better. The massive move,
touching one Grézien out of six, had been short. In comparison with emigration
tendencies in Brussels, Charleroi or industrial Hainault, we can see that emigration to
the New World was directly related to unusual socio-economic conditions and
circumstances as we tried to describe above. Emigration to the United States ceased
when the economy became better and allowed farmers to extend their activities.

Should we then talk about the explosion of the "safety valve" in order to
escape overpopulation, under employment and poverty? Emigration to the New
World went on again but would never reach the 1853 and 1856 levels.

The population balance-sheet of this emigration wave can help us to measure
the phenomenon amplitude in each one of the 9 hamlets. In 1852, the two first
families left from Gastuche and Doiceau. In 1853, among the eighteen families
departing from the Grez Doiceau areas, seven families came from Doiceau and five
others came from Royenne. In 1846, Doiceau had 347 inhabitants and Royenne had
105, so that depopulation reached an alarming level in both hamlets (over one-fifth
of the inhabitants left Royenne during this first year). During 1855 and 1856, Hèze,
Centry and Bayarmon firstly, then Grez, gave the largest proportion of Belgian
pioneers. In all, depopulation reached a 13 per cent level for the whole "commune"
and half the population left Bayarmont; as far as Royenne is concerned, one-third of the inhabitants went overseas. Trying to classify the emigrants by age, family importance and socio-economical situation, it comes to light that few unmarried persons decided to emigrate overseas. These, rather, moved to the Brussels or Charleroi areas.

Most of the time, families with young children decided to make the big step to the New World. Professionally speaking, many day-laborers, working mainly in farms, as well as industrial employees constituted the majority of the emigrants' lot. While trying to figure out the emigrants goods and money, thanks to notary records, we are astonished to see the small extent of their possessions.

Among the 425 emigrants, more than 200 were under twenty; approximatively 150 emigrants were between twenty and forty years old and sixty of them were older than forty. There also were more men than women since more single men than single women emigrated.

Knowing life overseas would represent several difficulties, only relatively young persons felt they would be able to survive the situation. About ten couples contracted marriage right before leaving, since finding a husband or a wife overseas would represent one more difficulty to overcome.

Here, on purpose, we bring our contribution to the study of emigration to a close at the moment our brave pioneers settled on the American ground.

We wish to close this chapter with an extract from a letter sent from the Green Bay area by a Grézien pioneer to his family, summarizing somehow the first months of their new life in the New World. On May the 1st 1857, Charles Lhost wrote his brother, trying to reassure him about his situation in Wisconsin:

"Dear brother, you have been told or might even think that we are unhappy. Dear brother, ..., we are not unhappy, I even thank God to have led us to such a good country, mostly for farmers. As for the one saying we are unhappy here, I believe he has not been blessed by the Holy God. We live in a very fertile country and the harvest is tremendously good.

Dear brother, do not feel sorry for me and do not worry about us, I am luckier and happier than most farmers in your area. Most of all, what is the biggest thing of all, I am independant!"