

FOREWORD

"To forget our ancestors is to be like a river without a source, like a rootless tree".

(Chinese proverb)

Dear reader,

This book is dedicated to all who restlessly search for their ancestors' early origins, to all who try to remove dust from forgotten and concealed treasures, to all who try to gather the pieces of their history in order to pass on to their descendants their proven origins. A little before my father died, I promised him that I would find information about one of his great-grand fathers who had gone to the United States. Our family had lost track of his adventurous steps. The note found in records at the former community of Petit-Rosière, Belgium, confirmed the story of Antoine Ducat, born in Glimes, Brabant Province, who had gone to the United States the 24th of August in 1858 at the age of 54 years. Since the departure coincided with the large migration wave in the 19th century (a wave that took thousands of countrymen of Brabant to the Midwest), I traveled three times over to the old Belgian colonies in Illinois and Wisconsin. Once there, the same old questions came over and over again : Why did the immigrant ancestor leave and with whom ? Where is the native village situated ? Does his house still exist ? I also wanted to know more about these Walloons who, during the past century, created a Roman Country in huge America. So, the idea was born to satisfy the natural and deep curiosity and to plan a long term project. On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, people were ready for long researches. It was decided to stick to the rural emigration phenomenon only, and particularly to the East Brabant and Hesbaye Namuroise areas from which most pioneer families originated. Scientific help was found at the Demographics Department of Louvain-la-Neuve University which is situated in the area touched by the rural emigration of the 1850's. Research was first directed toward the village of Grez-Doiceau. This choice wasn't pure chance. The first expedition of emigrants originating from Grez-Doiceau opened the way to the Midwest for more waves of emigration after 1853, into Brown, Kewaunee, and southern Door counties in Northeastern Wisconsin. On the other side, Grez-Doiceau provided more than 500 pioneers who settled around the present-day Robinsonville-Champion area (originally called : «Aux premiers Belges»). This book is relating the socio-economic situation of the Grez-Doiceau families at the time of their departure from Belgium. It's not the history of the Belgian colony created in America. The writers will detail each

major event of the Walloon emigrants from birth until their arrival in the New World. In fact, we have studied this migration phenomenon underlining two specific aspects : its causes and its quantitative importance as well as aspects which have been revealed, thanks to modern computerized techniques. The book also tries to make a comparison between those families that left and those that stayed in the village. We hope this work will help our American colleagues, either to gather new information about Belgian emigrants or to enlarge their knowledge of history. In return, we expect them to give us new tracks to follow and new directions to look into. American and Belgian teams, working in such a way, will keep alive our national motto «L'union fait la force», a motto left by our common ancestors meaning «Unity is strength».

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