

The journey of a Belgian emigrant family: the Meese's (1858-1913)

Mario Robert
Archivist and historian
Société historique de Montréal

At the end of 1863 or the beginning of the following year, a modest family from the rural community of Ruiselede left West Flanders for Canada. Joseph Meese, Rosalie Meire and their two young children, Prudence and Charles, accompanied Édouard Simays, a Belgian-Canadian who dreamed of establishing the linen industry in his new country and becoming an immigration officer.

This story map aims to tell the story of this family's journey from Belgium to the island of Montreal. It is part of the project [Trois siècles de migrations francophones en Amérique du Nord](#).

Map on the right:

- Henry Withmer Hopkins, *Atlas of the city and island of Montreal, including the counties of Jacques Cartier and Hochelaga from actual surveys, based upon the cadastral plans deposited in the office of the Department of Crown Lands, 1879*. BAnQ numérique, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2244120>

West and East Flanders

At the beginning of the 19th century, the rural economy of these two Flemish provinces was based on agriculture and the production of linen cloth at home.

The agricultural territory was extremely fragmented. This situation favored the large landowners who hired farm servants or rented land with often high leases. On the other hand, the small landowner was in charge of a farm that often consisted of a garden.

Around 1845-1846, the potato disease (mildew) hit Flemish agriculture and caused a famine due to a major increase in the price of food.

Flax spinning and weaving provided farm families with an additional income. These proto-industrial activities serve to pay the rent of the house and the land.

However, in the 1840s, the introduction of mechanical spinning and the arrival of linen from England "caused the sudden disappearance of an activity that supported hundreds of thousands of people" (translated from Gubin and Scholliers 1996: 366).

In the following years, the weaver loses the control of his working tools which belong to a manufacturer or a merchant. As for the spinners, they are transformed into seamstresses, glove-makers, lace-makers at home also under the control of contractors. They thus become entirely dependent and for many others, it is the unemployment.

Texts on the right:

Western Flanders

After the conquest of Flanders from the Austrians, the revolutionary France separated the county into two departments. The department of the Lys was created on October 1st, 1795. With the first abdication of Napoleon and the treaty of Paris in 1814, the departmental territory became the province of West Flanders (West-Vlaanderen), which was attached to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and then, after the revolution of 1830, to the Kingdom of Belgium.

Land parcels, 1834 and 1847

"The cadastre started in 1808, was completed in Flanders in 1834... In 1847, the number of cadastral parcels amounted to 822,885; there has thus been, in the interval of the last fourteen years, an increase of 30,036 parcels... In West Flanders, in 1834, for an area of 323,449 hectares, the number of parcels was 657,282, and that of the owners 76,393. In 1847, these numbers raised respectively to 676,381 parcels and 86,157 owners. (Translated from Ducpétiaux, 1850, p. 64).

Arrondissement of Tielt, 1847-1848

"Misery is greater in West Flanders. The number of indigents in the district of Tielt was 25,992 in 1847 (42%) and 22,217 in 1848 (40%). (Translated from Ducpétiaux, 1850, p. 24).

Visit of a weaver in the vicinity of Tielt, around 1847

"... he works by the job receiving two sous per aune and he can make four to five aunes a day, but he has no work in a current way; thus, last year, he could only make three pieces; when he was not weaving, he was spinning or working in the fields; he exploits an arpent of land; during a quarter of the year, he works in the fields for the others... (Translated from Ducpétiaux, 1850, p. 81)".

Eastern Flanders

After its conquest of Flanders from the Austrians, revolutionary France separated the county into two departments. The department of L'Escaut was created on October 1st, 1795. With the first abdication of Napoleon and the treaty of Paris, in 1814, a large part of the county territory became the province of East Flanders (Ost-Vlaanderen), which was attached to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and then, after the revolution of 1830, to the Kingdom of Belgium.

Charity offices, 1847

"In East Flanders, 14,645 weavers and 39,556 spinners were registered in the registers of the charity offices: "In 1847, out of a figure of 171,681 indigents counted in the countryside, there were 30,982-day laborers, 2,089 manure collectors and 2,319 farmers: in total, 35,990 rural workers who could not find in agricultural work the resources necessary to satisfy their most pressing needs (Translated from Ducpétiaux, 1850, p. 20).

Manufactures and the countryside, around 1848

"It should be noted that a part of the workers of the countryside in Eastern Flanders work for the factories, while in Western Flanders, they have hardly other resources than the occupations of the fields and the handling of flax (Translated from (Ducpétiaux, 1850, p.57)".

Family origins

The family history of Joseph Meese, Rosalie Meire and their relatives begins before the creation of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830. It has its roots in the Austrian Netherlands, then in the French Revolution, in the integration of Flanders into the First Empire and in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands after the final fall of Napoleon in 1815. The life of these Catholic peasant-workers who are speaking Flemish is mainly concentrated around two neighboring municipalities: Aalter in East Flanders and Ruiselede in West Flanders.

Map on the right:

- *Chronological mosaic of the map of Belgium, frozen in 1873, 1860-1873.*
<http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/> (georeferenced map). **Note:** first map surveyed and leveled on the ground by the officers of the War Depot, from 1860 to 1873.

Texts on the right:

Brief history of the municipality of Ruiselede (West Flanders)

Located a few kilometers from Aalter, traces of human occupation can be found here as early as prehistoric times. Its name, Rusleda, appears from 1106. The first religious congregation was founded in 1688: Our Lady of the Seven Woes (Congregatie Zusters Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van 7 Weeën). In the following century, the nuns opened a boarding school as well as an industrial school and a school for poor girls. In 1846, Ruiselede had 6,700 inhabitants at the time of the economic crisis and the famine. Six years later, the municipality welcomed a charitable institution with a model farm, in fact a reformatory school for boys. It was built in the old factory that manufactured beet sugar. In the 1856 census, the population increased to 6,900, but decreased to 6,500 by the 1866 census.

Apart from the village, Ruiselede has seven inhabited areas: Axpoele, Molenakker, Strookot, Vlaeyt, Zandvleuge and Zuydwyk.

Brief history of the municipality of Aalter (East Flanders)

Inhabited since prehistoric times, the name Aalter appeared in 974. Situated between Ghent and Bruges, the municipality is crossed by a navigation canal since the 17th century. Aalter was then on the route of a railroad line and a station was opened in August 1838. By 1846, the population of Aalter had grown to almost 6,400. In the 1856 census, Aalter lost about 100 residents, but by the 1866 census, the population had risen to 6,500. Apart from the village, the municipality consists of ten sectors: Aelterbrugge, Aeltershoekskén, Aelterplaetse, Looveldt, Maenewaerde, Oosterghem, Oostmeulen, Oudenmolen, Sterre and Straethem.

Carel Ludovicus Meese (1768-1845)

The Meese, or Meesens, family has lived in the municipality of Aalter since the 18th century. Joseph's father, Carel (or Carolus) Ludovicus, was the son of Jean-Baptiste and Catherine Thomas. He was baptized on December 16, 1768 in the parish of Sint-Cornelius.

In January 1796, Carel Ludovicus married Anna Jacoba D'Hont, originally from Ruiselede and already twice widowed. He is the only one of the two spouses to sign the marriage certificate. Four boys and a girl were born between 1796 and 1804. The first one, Petrus Franciscus, died tragically by drowning in a cesspit at the age of 16 months.

Anna Jacoba died in April 1824 at the age of 63. In the same year, at the age of 55, Carel Ludovicus married another widow, Coleta Van Parys, with whom he had two children: Joseph born in 1825 and Jean-Baptiste, in 1827.

On 12 Nivôse of the year IX (January 2, 1801), as a witness to the birth of a nephew D'Hont, Carel Ludovicus is identified as a farmer. On the arrival of his daughter Amelia on September 23, 1801 (1 Vendémiaire year X), he is described as a weaver. Between 1804 and 1827, we discover that his occupations appear to be multiple and non-exclusive, as is the case for most rural Europeans: laborer, farmer, day laborer (daghuerman) and weaver. This is what the French historian Didier Terrier refers to as pluriactivity (Terrier, 2017, p.115).

Throughout his life, Carel Ludovicus does not seem to have owned even a small lot. Before his death on June 3, 1845, at the age of 76, he lived in a rented house in the Baerlers area of Aalter. This tiny hamlet had only a few dwellings and land belonging to the Belgian army, which were occupied by day laborers. The majority of the agricultural land in the area belongs to a noble family, the Kervyns.

Map on the right:

- Joseph Johann Frantz Ferraris. *Carte de cabinet des Pays-Bas autrichiens levée à l'initiative du comte de Ferraris, 1771-1778.* KBR Bbiliothèque royale de Belgique,

<https://opac.kbr.be/LIBRARY/doc/SYRACUSE/16992733>;
<http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/>

Text on the right:

Report on the death of Meese's child, 1798

Today the 10th Germinal, sixth year of the French Republic, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, have appeared before me Ignaes Van Caneghem, agent of the municipality of Aalter, district of Nevele, Department of the Schelde, in the townhall, Joanna Van Hulle, wife of Jacques Cocquyt, 61 years old, and Joannes Van de Keere, labourer, 29 years old, both living in the aforementioned village, who have declared to me, Ignaes Van Caneghem, that on hearing and seeing small children around the cesspit of aforementioned Joannes Van de Keere, went to see and found therein the little child of a Carel Ludovicus Meese.

De verbo ad verbum as follows: actum 10 Germinal the 6th year of the French Republic, on the aforementioned day at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it was reported to me Ignaes Van Caneghem, municipal agent of Aalter, district of Nevele, that the deceased child, aged around 16 months, of Carel Ludovicus Meese, labourer living within this village area Dorp, was found in the cesspit or toilet of Joannes Van de Keere, inhabitant of Aalter, whilst the said Meese, father of the child and his wife, were absent. On receiving this report I have, as aforementioned agent, in the absence of Maximiliaan Francis Sencie, Justice of the peace of District Nevele, immediately made my way to the said cesspit and the house of the said Meese, where the deceased child had been put, to be observed by Joannes de Zutter, certified health officer, domiciled within this village, whom I had requested to visit the corpse and who in my presence examined the deceased child, and concluded that the said child had suffocated in the sludge and drowned therein without that any other cause of death could be found on the child. He judged that further investigation was not necessary, considering the witness statements of Joanna Van Hulle, wife of Jacques Cocquyt, and Joannes Van de Keere who, upon hearing the shouts of the other children, had pulled the body of the child of Meese out of the pit. I therefore contacted Carel van de Sompel, carpenter of the village of Aalter, to make a child's coffin and declared that the said body could be buried if no further investigations were required. I learned that the said Carel Ludovicus Meese wished to bury the child and thus took it upon himself to take further responsibility in this matter. Here ended the official report.

(Dutch to English translation: Marleen de Wulf)

Coleta Van Parys (1785-1847)

Coleta Van Parys was born on March 10, 1785 in Lotenhulle, near Aalter. On 4 Floréal of the year XIII "of the French Era" (24 April 1805), she married the widower Augustin Danneels. Coleta gave birth to seven children, including a pair of twins, between 1806 and 1817. During the latter year, Augustin worked as a day laborer along the Coupure, a waterway in Ghent. He died there on December 6, 1817 at the age of 42. His wife was only 32 years old.

At the time of the 1818 census, Coleta worked as a spinner, as she had at her marriage thirteen years earlier, and lived with her daughters Angèle (10), Jeanne Catherine (8) and Reine (1). Unlike the neighboring houses, the Van Parys-Danneels' house has only one household. Two other children are found elsewhere in the commune. Rosalie (12 years old) lives with the plowwoman Barbe Thérèse Hoste (widow Strobbe) and her sons, where she works as a servant. A twin, Jean-Baptiste - his brother Charles Louis died in 1813 - lives as a farm servant with a relative Danneels. No information could be found concerning the fate of Barbe, born in August 1813.

On September 25, 1824, in her home town, Coleta married the widower Carel Ludovicus Meese, whose children were married at that time. From this new union two more boys were born, this time in Aalter: Joseph (25 October 1825) and Jean-Baptiste (14 October 1827). In both cases, Coleta is identified as a housewife (huisvrouw). It is assumed that her children with Augustin Danneels followed their mother, because they do not appear in the 1829 census in Lotenhulle.

At the time of the first Belgian census in 1846, Coleta lives with her son Jean-Baptiste in the area, in fact a road, Oudleiken. There are thirteen dwellings in this area with fifteen families and a total of 61 people. Among these households, four are headed by women, one of whom is identified as a plowwoman, while the others are spinners like Coleta Van Parys. The men were mostly day laborers, but there was also a plowman, a carpenter (timmerman) and a cotton weaver (kantoenwever).

The following year, in the middle of a famine and while typhus was raging, 13 of the 61 inhabitants (21%) died between March 1847 and February 1849, including four children under the age of 7 and five adults aged 52 and 76. Coleta Van Parys was one of the deceased. She died on July 10, 1847 at the age of 62.

Map on the right:

- Philipp Christian Popp, Parcel map of the municipality of Aeltre : with the mutations, 1842-1879. KBR Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, <https://opac.kbr.be/LIBRARY/doc/SYRACUSE/16958351>; <http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/>

Text on the right:

Possible places of residence of Coleta Van Parys in 1847

According to the information in the population register of Aalter for 1847-1856, Coleta and her son Jean-Baptiste could have lived in one of these four residences in Oudleiken. All the lots numbered 424 to 429 are the property of Jeanne Van Caneghem (1789-1861) from Ghent, dowager of Eugene Joseph De Naeyer. She owned a lot of lands and buildings in Aalter and Lotenhulle.

Map below:

Philipp Christian Popp, Parcel plan of the municipality of Aeltre: with mutations, 1842-1879. *KBR Bbliothèque royale de Belgique (extract)*.

Bernard Meire (1801-1865)

The Meire family has lived in Ruiselede since at least the 17th century. Bernard, father of Rosalie, was the son of Emmanuel and Isabella Clara Van Landuyt. He was born on "the twenty ninth nivôse of the French Republic" (January 10, 1801) in the Axpoele sector of the commune where his father was a farmer. The latter died the following year at the age of 63.

In 1817, in addition to the army, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands established a national militia based on voluntary service, but with little success. The state then turned to an annual drawing of lots in each locality. All men of 19 years of age had to register. Bernard Meire belonged to the 1820 draw. The young weaver of "5 feet, 2 inches and 7 lines" (12 lines correspond to 1 inch) does not ask for an exemption and considers himself "capable". On March 27, 1820, he was "designated for service". Probably favored by fate, he did not join any military corps, unlike other members of his cohort.

In September, Bernard Meire married Coleta De Waele, also from Ruiselede, eight years his senior and 19 weeks pregnant. Six daughters and three sons were born between 1821 and 1840. Three of them died at the ages of 4, 11 and 12.

In 1826, the family lived with the worker Karel De Waele, probably a relative of Coleta, in the Strookot neighborhood of Ruiselede sector F (lots 838-839).

At the end of the 1830s, Bernard Meire owned two small plots in Strookot, which were adjacent to those of Karel De Waele. Their houses even seem to have a common wall.

Like many Flemings, Meire's occupations are varied in the official records. A weaver in the militia register, he becomes a laborer six months later. He is identified under this occupation until 1827. He became a weaver again from 1832 to 1837, and a worker again from 1840 to 1858. Like Carel Ludovicus Meese, his tasks were not exclusive, as pluriactivity was common among rural people.

Bernard Meire died on September 2, 1865 in his residence, at the age of 65.

Map on the right:

- Philippe Vandermaelen, Map of Belgium, 1846-1854.
<http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/>

Text on the right:

Bernard Meire's house and garden, circa 1845

The two parcels belonging to Rosalie Meire's father are numbered 840 and 841 in sector F of Ruiselede. On the first one, we find the family house which measures sixteen square meters while the garden, on the second one, is evaluated at 160 square meters.

At that time, the residence included, in addition to the two parents, seven children aged from 5 to 20 years. The eldest, Augustin, was doing his military service. It seems to be joined with the house of the adjacent plot that belongs to the worker Karel De Waele, a relative of Coleta, where the family had lived before. Several plots around the house belong to large landowners such as baron De Secus from Brussels, lawyer Joseph De Roo from Ghent, engineer Theodore Vandenhecken from Bruges or smaller ones such as innkeeper Auguste Verhove from Ruiselede.

Map below:

Philipp Christian Popp, *Plan parcellaire de la commune de Ruiselede : avec les mutations, 1842-1879*. KBR Bbliothèque royale de Belgique (extrait).

Coleta DeWaele (1793-1890)

Coleta DeWaele, born on November 27, 1793, was the natural daughter of Joanna Carolina De Waele. At the time of her conception, between mid-February and early March, the French revolutionary army occupied the territory. After the defeat of Neerwinden at the hands of the Austrians on March 18, the French retreated. It is therefore possible that Coleta's biological father could be a French soldier.

On September 25, 1820, in Ruiselede, Coleta De Waele married Bernard Meire, 19 years old. The bride was expecting her first child, Augustin, who was born on February 1, 1821. Between 1822 and 1840, Coleta gave birth eight times. Her first daughter, Rosalia, was born in 1822, but died in 1826. Subsequently came Sofia (1825), a new Rosalia (1827) and Pelagia (1829). In 1832 and 1835, it was the turn of two boys: Joannes Franciscus and Bernardus. Following Amelia (or Melania) in 1837, the youngest daughter Ursula was born in 1840.

Recognized as a spinner at her marriage and for most of her life, Coleta identified herself as a housewife (*huisvrouw*) from 1821 to 1837. Three of her daughters worked as spinners, while the last one learned lacemaking at the industrial school run by the sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Seven Woes.

Her longevity was such that three of her children died before the age of 12 and two others migrated to Canada. Coleta DeWaele died in Ruiselede on March 4, 1890, at the age of 96, while living with her daughter Pelagie and her son-in-law Ivo Vanoverbeke.

Image on the right:

- Spinner in Flanders, postcard, 1917. Personal collection of the author

Joseph Meese and Rosalie Meire

Joseph Meese was born on October 20, 1825 in Aalter. Registered under the name Josephus Meessens, he was the first child of the couple Carel Ludovicus Meessens, a 56-year-old weaver, and Coleta Van Parys, a 40-year-old spinner. Because of their age, only one other child, Jean Baptiste, was born on October 14, 1827.

Like all young men his age, he was entered in the militia register for the year 1844, but was not chosen. Although Joseph was less than 1.57 m tall, the height required for military service, the officer in charge recorded "Defect in height" and exempted him for one year. He never seems to have presented himself again and was only released from this obligation a few months before his marriage.

Absent from Aalter in the 1846 census, he was in Ruiselede around 1856 working as a farm servant for Joannes Martens.

Rosalie Meire was born in Ruiselede on October 22, 1827. She was the daughter of Bernard Meire, a 26-year-old laborer, and Coleta De Waele, a 33-year-old housewife and spinner. Together with her sisters Sofia and Pelagia, she learned to spin from her mother.

On October 8, 1858, in Ruiselede in West Flanders, Joseph Meese married Rosalie Meire who was eight months pregnant. The marriage certificate specifies that Joseph is a servant, certainly a farm servant, who already lives in this commune and that Rosalie is a spinner. They are respectively 32 and 30 years old.

In November, the couple moved to the neighboring town of Wingene to live with Rosalie's sister Sofia, who had been married since 1848 to the worker Karel Louis Allaert. The couple raised four daughters and a son: Prudence, Melanie, Edouard and Louise (born in June). The family has lived in this commune since the beginning of 1857.

It was in Wingene that Rosalie gave birth to her first child, Ursula, on November 18, 1858. Unfortunately, she died the next day. Joseph worked there as a laborer until they returned to Ruiselede in April 1859, according to the Wingene directory, or on March 16, 1859, according to the Ruiselede directory.

Upon their arrival in Ruiselede, the couple stayed with the spinners Serafina and Amelie Mestdagh, two unmarried sisters, in the Axpoele area. In the population register, Joseph and Rosalie are identified as landman and spinner. It is probably at this place that Prudence was born on November 20, 1859.

In 1860 or early 1861, the family moved to a house in the Meulenacker (Molenacker) neighborhood, near the village of Poeke (Poucques).

This house originally housed the Dinneweth siblings, bachelors between the ages of 42 and 49. The two brothers worked as weavers while the three sisters spun yarn until they left for Poeke in November 1856.

The Meeses lived there with another family, the farmer Ivo Bogaert, the spinner Amelie Stofferie and their two children born in 1851 and 1862 respectively.

Two other children were born in this environment. Henri (Henricus) was born on July 18, 1861 but died two days later. Charles (Carolus Ludovicus) was born on November 13, 1862.

In his census of the beginning of the 1860s, the enumerator omits to register Prudence. Unfortunately, the population register of Ruiselede for the years 1846-1866 does not mention the date of departure of the Meese-Meire family to North America.

Map on the right:

- Chronological mosaic of the map of Belgium, frozen in 1873, 1860-1873. <http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/> (georeferenced map). **Note:** First map surveyed and leveled on the ground by the officers of the War Depot, from 1860 to 1873.

Living in Flanders

The living conditions of the Meeses around 1862-1863 are not known, but we can try to characterize them from archives, writings or images of that era.

Joseph and Rosalie practiced the Catholic religion and used the "popular Flemish language" in a country where French was "the only recognized official language used by the public authorities throughout the kingdom, including Flanders (Witte, 2017, p. 62)." In Ruiselede, in 1866, a Russian pedagogue who came to visit the reform school could not make himself understood by the Flemish peasants, because "[p]eople among them spoke French, and even then, they spoke it very little...[b]ut from the rich landowners it was easy for me to obtain information (quoted by Ronin, 1992, p. 947)."

Unlike his father, half-brother Benjamin (1799-1858), and half-sister Amelia (1801-1843), Joseph was unable to sign his name. Throughout his life, he could not read or write, nor could Rosalie.

The family lives in the Meulenacker area, east of the village, together with the Bogaert family, on a plot of land possibly rented from a large landowner such as the engineer Augustus Cardon from Ghent or the farmer Jan De Sutter from Ruiselede. Situated a short distance from a mill, this small piece of land contains a worker's house and a garden where potatoes grow, the basis of the Flemish peasant diet since the 18th century.

Inside the house, there are two rooms: "one where the loom and the bed are located, the other where the cooking and the spinning are done" (Translated from Ducpétiaux, 1850, p. 82). The

Belgian intimist painter Henri de Braekeler (1840-1888) also gives us a slightly different view of the furnishings of a rural family.

As a farm labourer, Joseph works for a farmer. Back home or on his days off, he weaves linen. Rosalie, on the other hand, must spin it, prepare the meals, maintain the garden and take care of her daughter Prudence and her baby Charles-Louis. The two children were too young to do any work related to the land or to spinning. These proto-industrial activities, spinning and weaving for merchants or contractors, remain a matter of survival for a household where the peasant wage cannot meet basic needs.

Their diet is not very varied. The family eats mainly potatoes with beaten milk and rye bread. Meat (500 grams/day) and beer (1 liter/day), rather rare during the crisis of 1846-1848, are part of the "five articles of first necessity, which we suppose must enter the consumption of each household (Translated from Dupétiaux, 1850, p. 210)" with bread (2 kilos/day), potatoes (4 kilos/day) and coal (1,000 kilos/year).

Ties to relatives are important. The families live a few kilometers away and are also workers and spinners. Before their return to Ruiselede in 1859, Joseph and Rosalie lived for a time in Wingene with Sophie Meire and Carolus Ludovicus Hallaert. At the birth of Prudence, Jean-Baptiste, brother of Joseph and resident of Lotenhulle, is one of the two witnesses. For the birth of Henri and Charles, it was the turn of Bernard Meire, their maternal grandfather.

Joseph and Rosalie's daily life is punctuated by work all year long. Did they have any free time and how did they spend it? Around 1850, except for Sundays, there were about ten holidays. These were the great ritual festivals such as Christmas and Easter, as well as "five 'societal' days (New Year's Day, Carnival, the weavers' festival in May and the Great Festival, which lasted two days in July)" (Translated from Maitte and Terrier, 2020, p. 268). In Ruiselede, in addition to the Friday markets, the fairs of the year are held on May 3 and September 8. Apart from the necessary rest, one can think that the Meese family follows the religious celebrations and feasts, visits the maternal grandparents where there are still two sisters and a brother of Rosalie. If not, can we see them at the time of the various annual popular celebrations?

Image on the right:

- Henri de Braekeleer. *La fileuse*, 1868. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles. <https://www.fine-arts-museum.be/fr/la-collection/henri-de-braekeleer-la-fileuse?artist=de-braekeleer-henri>

Leaving Europe

The great rural crisis and famine of the 1840s in Flanders did not lead to an exodus overseas. However, Flemings were already migrating to France, sometimes on a seasonal basis. All these migrants were concentrated in the textile industry in the north, where "the triangle Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing became a real Belgian 'colony'; more than a third of the population (37%) was Belgian" (Translated from Gubin and Schollers, 1996, p. 384). Joseph's half-brother, Carel Ludovicus, settled in Roubaix with his family. His descendants were workers in the wool or

cotton spinning workshops (weavers, spinners and reattachers), while others were earthworkers.

Apart from a few migratory "fevers" such as that of Walloons to Wisconsin in 1855-1856, few Belgians crossed the ocean. Before the twentieth century, those who did leave joined a relative or friend who had already settled.

In the case of Joseph Meese and Rosalie Meire, this migration also occurred through a contact, that of a self-proclaimed immigration agent: Édouard Simays, a Belgian settled in Montreal since 1851.

Among their relatives, with a few exceptions, no one left. So why did the Meeses leave Flanders? The economic arguments do not seem to be sufficient. On the other hand, the reasons for their exodus become impossible to determine. At best, we can consider explaining the process of departure from two events of 1862 and 1863.

On March 13, 1862, Ambroise Hector Verret, the emigration agent for United Canada, arrived in Brussels after a stay in Paris. He was sent to France and Belgium to attract new immigrants. The following month, he headed to Ghent, where he stayed for 12 days and to Bruges for 10 days. According to Verret, several Flemings wanted to settle there, but none left. Was Joseph one of them?

The following year, the Belgian-Canadian Édouard Simays, disappointed at not getting Verret's job, went to his native country to settle some family business. He travelled through the countryside of Flanders to encourage farmers to come to Canada.

On December 3, 1863, he placed an advertisement in the Tielt Gazette in West Flanders. English translation reads as follows:

To the Editor of the GAZETTE DE THIELT

Please notify through your honorable journal all those who wish to accompany me to Canada that it is high time they made preparations and came to me, as I am about to embark at short notice.

Your dear friend E. SIMAYS

Only one family responded to this private initiative, that of Joseph Meese (38 years old) and Rosalia Meire (36 years old) and their two children, Prudence and Charles, aged 4 years and 13 months respectively.

At the end of December or the beginning of January 1864, the group left Ruiselede, probably heading for the railway station of Aalter, where they took the train to Ostend via Bruges. From there, together with Simays, they boarded the Belgium or Holland, boats of the General Steam Navigation company to London. They then boarded the train to Liverpool.

At the city's docks, they boarded the Montreal Ocean Steamship Line's Bohemian, better known as the Allan Line. Under the command of Captain Borland, the ship had 19 cabins and a crew of

one hundred, with room for 199 people in the steerage. The ship left the port on February 4, 1864. The next day, after a stop in Londonderry, Ireland, she weighed anchor for North America.

Image on the right:

- Extract from: William Gavin Herdman. Liverpool Landing Stage, 1864. Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool Libraries.

Édouard Simays (1826-1897)

Born on June 7, 1826 in Sint-Eloois-Winkel in West Flanders, Édouard Simays was about the age of Joseph Meese (1825) and Rosalie Meire (1827). At the age of one, his family moved to Wakken in the same province, where they worked in the tools manufacturing for the linen industry.

In April 1850 he married Thecla Vandeputte in Ardoois. Five months later he emigrated to New York and in 1851 he settled in Canada. A schoolteacher in various municipalities in the greater Montreal area, he held other jobs such as grocer, bailiff and cemetery superintendent.

Between 1854 and 1862, he published articles in the Flemish and French-language newspapers of Belgium. Simays encouraged Belgian farmers, "the best in the world," to come to Canada to grow flax.

In the early 1860s, he applied to become an immigration agent for the province of Canada in Belgium. He had a good network to help him, including a committee of fellow Belgians chaired by gardener Léon Cool. However, the mission in Europe was entrusted to Ambroise-Hector Verret of Quebec City.

In 1863, Simays returned to Belgium to settle family matters. He wanted to use the funds he had acquired to be appointed by the Canadian government to establish flax growing in what is now Quebec by bringing in households at his own expense. The Meese family became the bridgehead of his project.

Finally, in 1869, the Canadian authorities appointed Édouard Simays as Canada's agent in Belgium. He settled in Antwerp, but had to return the following year because of the Franco-Prussian War. He tried to promote colonization in the Outaouais. Dismissed from the federal civil service in 1876, he settled in the Pontiac region. Simays remained there for five years and, disillusioned with his adopted province, emigrated with his family to Burlington, Vermont in 1883. He died there on April 5, 1897.

Édouard Simays was a complex character who was a schoolteacher and practiced many other trades. He was involved in many issues, immigration and agriculture. According to his biographer Denise Latrémouille, he was "an intelligent, dynamic, seductive man, but also feverish, quarrelsome and resentful" (Translated from Latrémouille, 2021, p. 129).

All the informations in this section were taken from the following book: LATRÉMOUILLE, Denise. Édouard Simays (1826-1897). Succès et misères d'un immigrant belge. Tielt, Familiekund Vlaanderen Regio Tielt, 2021. 147 p.

Map on the right:

- Chronological mosaic of the map of Belgium, frozen in 1873, 1860-1873. <http://www.cartesius.be/CartesiusPortal/> (georeferenced map). **Note:** First map surveyed and leveled on the ground by the officers of the War Depot, from 1860 to 1873.

Text on the right:

Édouard Simays (1826-1897): Some dates from Denise Latrémouille's book (2021, p. 12)

1826: Born in Belgium

1850: Emigration to New York

1851: Settles in Canada

1852-1866: Teacher in various parishes in the Montreal area, farmer, bailiff, cemetery superintendent and grocer

1863-1864: Travels to Europe and returns to Canada

1866-1872: Merchant in Saint-André d'Argenteuil

1869-1876: Canadian immigration agent in Belgium (1869-1870) and in Canada

1875-1876: Municipal councilor in Hull

1878-1882: Settler in Aldfield Township, Pontiac and Mayor in 1881-1882

1883: Moved to Burlington, Vermont

1897: Died in Burlington

Shipwrecked in Maine

Since leaving Londonderry on February 5, 1864, the Bohemian of the Montreal Ocean Steamship (Allan Line) has been sailing the Atlantic. It set sail for Portland, Maine, the winter port of Montreal. In addition to the crew and passengers, the ship carried mail for Canada and the United States.

On February 22, the Bohemian's arrival off the coast of Portland turned into a disaster. At 9 pm, the steamer sank on reefs six kilometers off the coast of Maine near an island. It sank in 1h30. Since 1857, this was the seventh vessel of the Allan Line company to sink off the coast and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a situation denounced by Montreal newspapers.

About forty people, mainly Americans and immigrants of Irish origin, died. Edouard Simays and the Meese family were among the survivors. Several newspapers and periodicals in Canada and America, including the New York Times, reported the tragedy. The citizens of Portland raised funds to help the passengers and provide them with clothing.

Simays and the Meeses are safe and sound but lost everything. For the former, it was "all these goods, valued at 300 pounds [\$1,200]" (Translated from Latrémouille 2021:66). In later correspondence, Simays identifies samples of linen cloth, seed, and implements and tools related to flax growing. For Joseph, Rosalie, and the children, these are their clothing and other personal effects.

Image on the right:

- "Wreck of the Bohemian as seen the morning after she sunk", *Harper's Weekly*, March 12, 1864. p. 173.

Getting to Montreal

On Thursday, February 25, at 7:40 a.m., Édouard Simays, the Meeses and other passengers for Canada took the Grand Trunk Railway to the metropolis of Canada. The day before, Simays had sent a dispatch to his relatives in which he mentioned that he had survived and "would be in Montreal on Thursday night (L'Ordre, February 26, 1864, p. 2).

After crossing the Victoria Bridge and disembarking at the Bonaventure train station, the Belgian couple and their two children stayed with the Simays in their house in the St. James district. The house, recently built and unfinished, was located at 59 St. Andrew Street at the corner of Mignonne (later De Montigny and De Maisonneuve). The 1864-1865 MacKays Directory lists Edward Simays as a merchant and Joseph Meese as a weaver.

At its March 11, 1864 meeting, the Executive of the Lower Canada Colonization Society (formed in 1861) passed a three-part resolution in support of the castaways. This text appeared in the newspaper L'Ordre on the 14th of the same month:

"1° That a subscription list be opened immediately to come to the aid of Mr. E. Simays and the Meesens family to provide them with the means to begin, as early as this spring, the establishment of a flax plantation in Lower Canada.

(2) That the Colonization Society have the disposal of the funds raised, which can only be paid on the order of the Board of Directors.

3° That the amount subscribed be used: 1° to provide for the most pressing needs of the Meesens family; 2° to obtain flax seed and the materials necessary for the cultivation of flax.

The amassed sums allow Simays "to make several trips to different localities, in order to be able to choose in an advantageous way the site where the first tests of establishment of an industry which made the fortune of several townships of Belgium were to be tried" (Appel du clergé, 1865, p. 25-26). Did Joseph Meese accompany him?

At its September 1864 meeting, the Colonization Society reported that a piece of land had been located and that "Reverend Dufresne... had helped him greatly with the initial expenses of

setting up (Appel du clergé, 1865, p. 26). Unfortunately, there is no mention of the place. In any case, Édouard Simays sold his Montreal property in February 1865 and, in June, we find him in Saint-Placide, Deux-Montagnes County, where he taught and lived. As for the Meese family, they settled in the parish of Rigaud.

Image on the right:

- John Henry Barton (1846-1866), Montreal Harbor at Market Square, ca. 1864 This is a bird's-eye view of the Montreal harbor at the Market Place. The foreground shows the square, the customs building, the Royal Insurance Co. building and other buildings along the harbor. The background shows the harbor and multiple sailing ships. The St. Lawrence River and the Victoria Bridge are in the background. City of Montreal Archives, P090-Y-P1.

Settling in Rigaud

Is the land identified by Édouard Simays for the cultivation of flax found in the municipality of Rigaud? The Meese family settled there around 1864 with the Belgian-Montreal gardener Léon Cool and his wife Isabella Francesca Rosalie Vanthournout, who had left Sainte-Marie ward of Montreal. As for Simays, he was on the other side of the Ottawa River, in Saint-Placide. In a letter dated June 22, 1865, Édouard Simays wrote to Urgel Archambault: "No fresh news from my settlers in Rigaud". What happened to break off communication with Joseph Meese and Rosalie Meire? On May 15, 1868, he wrote a letter to the Canadian Secretary of State Hector-Louis Langevin. He indicates that his pioneers "have been, by treason, taken away from him". What does he mean? Who else but the Meese family had deceived him? Is he targeting Leon Cool, despite their previous close relationship and the fact that Leon Cool was the godfather of Edward Jr. in February 1864? These questions remain unanswered.

The first two children born on Canadian soil to Rosalie Meire and Joseph Meese were baptized in the Sainte-Madeleine church in Rigaud. Mathilde was born on March 13, 1866. Her godfather and godmother were Léon Cool and Isabella Francisca Vanthournout. The following year, it was Jean-Baptiste's turn who was born on July 1st and whose godparents were John and Julie Glisson (Gleason).

On March 1, 1867, Émile-François Cool, son of Léon, left his grocery store on Panet Street in Montreal to buy two lots in Rigaud. The first one is located in Pointe-à-la-Raquette (or Domaine according to the 1862 cadastre), the second concession, while the second one is the extension of it. The first parcel covers an area of 90 arpents, three in front and thirty deep. The second covers an area of 61 arpents and 60 perches. Joseph Meese and his family worked and probably lived there until they left for Longue-Pointe in 1870. To thank Émile Cool and his wife Adeline Turnboom, they named them godparents of their fifth child born in 1869 and named Émile.

Image on the right:

- Plan officiel de la paroisse de Sainte-Magdeleine-de-Rigaud, comté de Vaudreuil par A.E.B. Courchesne, 15 août 1930. Archives nationales à Québec, E21,S555,SS3,SSS1,P85. BANQ numérique, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/archives/52327/3142957>

Note: The land of Émile-François Cool is framed in red.

Brothers of Charity

In 1864, the year of the Meese family's immigration, Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal made a trip to Rome. On his return, he stopped at the Brothers of Charity House in Ghent, Belgium. Bourget persuaded the Superior General to send religious to care for the elderly and orphans in Montreal. The first four arrived in Montreal in February 1865 and settled in the East Center part of the city. Two others arrived in December.

The Belgian Brothers took charge of the Hospice Saint-Antoine, founded by the philanthropist Antoine-Olivier Berthelet and erected in 1859. Lacking space, they built the Hospice Saint-Vincent de Paul in 1867-1868 on Mignonne Street (Maisonneuve) near Saint-Denis. The following year, the religious community was incorporated and became the Brothers of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. In 1873, the residence was transformed into the École de réforme Saint-Antoine.

At the same time, Berthelet purchased 170 arpents of land (over 580,000 square meters) in Longue-Pointe (lot 395). Its transfer to the congregation occurred in August 1870. Two brothers settled there and lived in the house which they named Saint-Joseph. With the help of a few young boarders who were learning gardening, they grew vegetables to feed those of the Saint-Vincent de Paul hospice. Since the farm was not profitable, they decided to rent it out at the end of 1872.

In 1884, at the request of Bishop Édouard-Charles Fabre, successor of Ignace Bourget, the Brothers of Charity founded the Saint-Benoît Asylum. They built this new institution on a part of their lot in Longue-Pointe, between the river and the public road (now Notre-Dame Street).

Map on the right:

- Henry Withmer Hopkins, Atlas of the city and island of Montreal, including the counties of Jacques Cartier and Hochelaga from actual surveys, based upon the cadastral plans deposited in the office of the Department of Crown Lands, 1879. BANQ numérique, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2244120>

Taking root in Longue-Pointe

How, in 1870, could a Belgian emigrant family end up in the eastern part of the island of Montreal, nearly 75 km from Rigaud? Why did the Meeses and their descendants put down roots in the municipality of Longue-Pointe? The answer again involves a Belgian: gardener Louis Kersse.

Kersse was born in 1825 in Hansbeke, East Flanders, only eight kilometers from Aalter, Joseph Meese's home town. He arrived in Montreal before 1856, when he married Louise (or Éloïse)

Guilbeault at Notre-Dame church. One of his witnesses was Édouard Simays. A member of the Belgian Committee from 1861-1862, he ran the Viger Gardens in the square of the same name.

With his wife, he lived on Labelle Street, a few houses from the Brothers of Charity. In his last will and testament, he designated the provincial superior of these religious as his executor. The hypothesis that he served as an intermediary between them and Joseph Meese is very plausible. Moreover, at the baptism of Marie-Louise Meese at Longue-Pointe in January 1871, her godfather and godmother were Louis Kersse and Marie-Éloïse Guilbault.

In the 1871 census, the family included six children, ranging in age from 12 years to a few months. Identified as a farm servant, Joseph Meese was probably already working for the Brothers of Charity. When, in December 1872, the Brothers decided to rent the farm and the land, which were not profitable for their needs, they turned to him.

The youngest of the family, Joseph Eusèbe, was born in February 1873. His middle name recalls the provincial superior of the community. The godfather was Charles (10 years old) and the godmother Prudence (12 years old).

Although Joseph and Rosalie could not read or write, communications with Belgium continued. The best example is the arrival of Rosalie's brother, Jean Meire, at an unknown date between 1875 and 1881 at Longue-Pointe. Born in Ruiselede in 1832, he avoided the military institution in 1852. As provided for in the Belgian law on the militia, he was exempted because his elder brother Augustin had served in the 9th line regiment from 1840 to 1847. The register of the drawing of lots of militiamen gives a physical description of Meire.

On April 29, 1879, the first-born, Prudence, left the family home to marry the day laborer Fernand Martineau, also from Longue-Pointe. Between 1886 and 1889, it was the turn of Charles, Mathilde, Émile and Jean-Baptiste (Johnny) to marry natives of the parish. In 1892, Marie-Louise chose Philius Robert, a cart driver, while Joseph Jr. married Mélina Faulkner the following year in the rebuilt church.

This second generation as well as their children were fully integrated into French Canadian society. None of them spoke the Dutch language, which was common to all children of Flemish immigrants in North America.

Image on the right:

- William Henry Edward Napier (1829-1894), Longue-Pointe, 1860. Library and Archives Canada. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/fra/accueil/notice?app=FonAndCol&IdNumber=2836218>

Cultivating at Longue-Pointe

In early 1873, Joseph Meese (47 years old) found himself in charge of the Brothers of Charity land for an annual rent of \$400. He had many years of farming experience as a laborer and farm servant. From Flanders, he knew how to grow potatoes, beets, rye and flax.

The first years, during an economic crisis, proved to be difficult. In June 1876, in a request to Bishop Montreal to relieve the community's finances, Brother Eusèbe wanted to sell ten acres of the Longue-Pointe farm. He writes that "unfortunately, the farmer cannot pay the rent of the farm (Archives of the Archdiocese of Montreal, K541-FC). Moreover, the four boys are still too young to work to their full capacity. The arrival of brother-in-law Jean Meire helped them a lot.

The Brothers' property had an area of 162 arpents (137 acres or more than 550,000 square meters). On the municipal roll of Longue-Pointe for 1878, it was worth \$6,000. In the 1881 census, Joseph, his son Charles and Jean Meire are identified as farmers. How does this rural settlement compare with those of the other farmers of Longue-Pointe?

In Longue-Pointe, for a population of 1,114, the number of owner-occupiers totaled 64 while farmers, including Joseph Meese, numbered 16 (20%). Ten years earlier, in 1871, the ratio was 80 owner-occupiers to 3 tenant-operators (3.75%). Land between 101 to 201 acres accounts for 43% of that cultivated, the same percentage for those 100 acres and under, compared to only 14% for 200 acres and over.

What are the Meeses farming on the island of Montreal? According to the inventory of agricultural tools found in a notarized deed of 1897, production was based on potatoes, cereals and hay. In Longue-Pointe in 1881, 1,123 bushels of spring wheat were collected for 137 acres, 102,000 bushels of potatoes for 795 acres, nearly 36,000 bushels of oats and 1,922 tons of hay for 2,051 acres under cultivation. Rye was not planted.

No comparison with the 1891 census is possible, since Côte Saint-Léonard was detached in 1886 from Longue-Pointe and part of Sault-au-Récollet, to become the municipality of Saint-Léonard-de-Port-Maurice.

The data for Longue-Pointe in 1891 are as follows:

- *Hay: 2,508 tons on 1,968 acres*
- *Oats: 12,690 bushels on 892 acres*
- *Potatoes: 20,245 bushels on 232 acres*
- *Barley: 2,263 bushels on 78 acres*
- *Spring Wheat: 783 bushels for 51 acres*
- *Turnips and other roots: 219 bushels on 4 acres*
- *Buckwheat: 1,466 bushels*
- *Peas: 1,325 bushels*
- *Corn: 75 bushels*
- *Millet and clover seed: 28 bushels*
- *Beans: 19 bushels*

In the 1891 census, the farmers of lot 395 were Joseph and his sons Jean-Baptiste and Joseph, while Jean Meire identified himself as a day laborer. The latter died that same year, on June 3 at the age of 59.

In 1897, the Meese family also kept four horses with harnesses and carriages, twelve cows and fifty poultry. We can therefore assume that they produced and sold milk and eggs. Moreover, according to Lovell's directory of 1895-1896, his son Joseph as well as his sons-in-law Ferdinand

Martineau and Joseph Renaud are milkmen. The latter lives on Létourneux street in the town of Maisonneuve. Did the clan also own geese, a traditional dish served in Belgium at Christmas according to an excerpt from a letter from Léon Cool published in the Journal des campagnes (Québec) in 1882?

Map on the right:

- Charles E. Goad, Atlas of the City of Montreal and vicinity in four volumes, from official plans - special surveys showing cadastral numbers, buildings & lots, 1912-1914. BANQ numérique, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2244204>

Texts on the right:

Farm house where the Meese family lives

This house has three dwellings. In 1878, the eight members of the Meese family, the merchant Napoléon Reeves (22 years old) and the family of the day laborer François Demange (45 years old), who numbered seven people, lived here. The eldest, Augustine, is a friend of Prudence Meese. At the latter's wedding in 1879, she was one of three people to sign the register. The 1881 census records that the parents and several children of the Demange family were born in Germany, although they were of French and Catholic origin. We can assume that they came from the Alsace-Lorraine occupied since 1871.

Photo from the book "De l'Asile Saint-Benoit-Joseph-Labre au Centre d'accueil Pierre-Joseph-Triest" by René Desrosiers, Éditions des Frères de la Charité, 1984, p. 7.

Farming tools and animals

Tools:

- *Harvester*
- *Mowing machine*
- *Large rake*
- *Double and single harrows*
- *Ploughs*
- *Potato harrows*
- *Grain mill*
- *Screen (grain cleaner)*
- *Large carts (4)*
- *Dumpers (3)*
- *Winter and summer carriages*
- *Harnesses and carriages*

Animals:

- *4 horses*
- *12 milk cows*
- *50 poultry*

Joseph and Rosalie's last years

On August 4, 1881, Joseph Meese and Rosalie Meire went to the notary Louis-Gaspard Hétu to write their wills. Apart from the usual religious considerations in this type of document, they both wished for their children "to have them educated, as far as it is possible". Each bequeathed his or her assets to the other spouse and appointed him or her as executor.

A first departure, that of Rosalie's brother, marked the family in June 1891. In the death certificate, it is mentioned that his two parents have left this world. Bernard Meire died in 1865, but his mother, Coleta DeWaele, did not die until 1890. Another proof that communication still exists between Belgium and Quebec. Rosalie's three sisters - Pelagia, Ursula and Sofia - will die in 1893, 1895 and 1898 respectively in Ruiselede and Wingene. The fate of her brother Augustin remains unknown. On the Meese side, Jean-Baptiste died in Lotenhulle in 1886.

The years 1896-1897 mark important changes. Joseph and his son Charles apply for naturalization. The father, having passed the age of 70, also decided to end his career as a farmer. On August 20, 1897, at the Hospice Saint-Benoît, the provincial superior, Brother Hildouard (Dominique Van Langendonck), allowed him to sublet the farm to his son Johnny (Jean-Baptiste). The latter, together with his own family, then cultivates the land with his parents.

Brother Hildouard was so taken with his fellow Belgian-Canadian that he "agrees and renews this day the promise already made to the said lessor that he and his wife will remain on the said land for life if they so desire (p.5). Johnny left the farm in 1900, however, and Ferdinand Martineau, Prudence Meese's husband, took over until 1907.

In the 1901 census, Joseph and Rosalie were living with their son Charles and his wife Célanire Roy, on Notre-Dame Street further east. However, the following year, Johnny offered his parents the bottom floor of his two-story house that he had built in the heart of the village, at the corner of Saint-Just and Notre-Dame streets. It is probably there that Joseph died on January 19, 1905 at the age of 79 years and 3 months, two years after their daughter Mathilde. His estate includes assets of \$1,610, mostly money owed by his sons Johnny and Charles. The liabilities are \$117.45 for the doctor, casket, funeral service and "low masses for the repose of the soul of the deceased".

In the fall, Johnny sold the house and his mother moved with her elder daughter Prudence at 2 Perrault Street (which became Bruneau Street and disappeared at the end of the 1990s). She was still living at the Martineau's home at the 1911 census.

Rosalie Meire died on January 9, 1913, at the age of 85, in the Longue-Pointe district of Montreal.

Text on the right:

House of Johnny (Jean-Baptiste) Meese, 1901

- *Two-story wooden house of 24 feet by 24 feet*
- *Flat roof made of gravel*
- *1st floor of 8 feet 6 inches from floor to ceiling*

- *2nd floor 8 feet from floor to ceiling*
- *1st floor floors in rough spruce boards and 2nd floor in tongue and groove pine boards with paper between the two floors*
- *Half-heavy floor between the two floors*
- *5 windows per floor with 6 panes of glass per frame of 14 inches x 16 inches*
- *4 doors, two with 4 panes and two with 1 pane*
- *Chimney with 9 inches sandstone pipe*
- *Interior of the first floor in pine for the four rooms with pantry also in pine and 3 bedroom doors*
- *Front and back galleries of the lower part of the house in wood without surround*
- *Price of 400 dollars*
- *To be delivered no later than May 8, 1901*
- *Contract between Placide Robillard, carpenter, and Johnny Mess cultivator, April 8, 1901, Louis-Gaspard Héту registry no. 2662. Archives nationales à Montréal.*

Epilogue

Today, the many descendants of Joseph Meese and Rosalie Meire know that they came from Belgium, that they lived in Longue-Pointe and that a street in the east end of Montreal bears their name. However, few knew about their life course and, above all, the importance of Belgian compatriots in the emigration and settlement of this Flemish family in Quebec.

This story map, whose objective was to tell the story of a Belgian emigrant family, could be updated and improved with new archives. New research could also lead to the creation of other digital products or articles on the Meeses as part of the project *Trois siècles de migrations francophones en Amérique du Nord*. Let's think more specifically about the integration and social mobility of the second generation with the example of the farmer, entrepreneur and politician Charles Meese (1862-1938).

To be continued...

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- **Garand A. Spikberg**, GIS Analyst Michigan Technological University Geospatial Research Facility, for helping me with my questions and problems concerning Story Map.

Texts on the right:

Charles Meese (1862-1938)

Charles Meese was born in Ruiselede (West Flanders, Belgium) on November 13, 1862. He was only fifteen months old at the time of the sinking of the Bohemian.

After farming with his father, Charles married Célanire Roy in 1886. She was the only daughter of Louis Roy dit Desjardins and Victoire Jeannotte dit Lachapelle. The couple settled with the Roy's and Charles cultivated his father-in-law's land, lot 406 of Longue-Pointe, where the present Meese Street is located.

In 1893, Louis Roy gave him the land under certain conditions, including the right to house his parents-in-law in the house until their death.

Later, Charles Meese operated an aqueduct, was elected president of the Longue-Pointe school board and ran for alderman on the Montreal city council in 1912, but without success. At the same time, he began dividing his property and selling lots.

Célanire Roy and Charles Meese died without children. The first died in 1936 and the second on November 11, 1938. Their two graves are in the Eastern Cemetery (now Repos Saint-François d'Assise).

Photo below:

Charles Meese, circa 1909. La Patrie, 28 août 1909, p. 12.

Home of Charles Meese, 1909

"La résidence de M Meese, président de la Commission Scolaire de la Longue-Pointe", *La Patrie*, samedi 28 août 1909, p. 9.

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Family Search (<https://www.familysearch.org/fr/>)

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Timeline

- **1825 (October 20):** Birth in Aalter (East Flanders, United Kingdom of the Netherlands) of Joseph Meese (Josephus Meesens), son of Carolus Ludovicus Meesens (age 56) and Coleta Van Parys (age 40).
- **1827 (October 22):** Birth in Ruiselede (West Flanders, United Kingdom of the Netherlands) of Rosalie Meir, daughter of Bernardus Meir (age 26) and Coleta Dewaele (age 33).
- **1845 (June 3):** Death of Carolus Ludovicus Meessens at the age of 76 in Aalter (East Flanders, Belgium). He was born on December 16, 1768 in Aalter.

- **1847 (July 10):** Death of Coletta Van Parys at the age of 62 years in Aalter (East Flanders, Belgium). She was born on March 10, 1785 in Lotenhulle (East Flanders, Belgium).
- **1858 (October 8):** Marriage of Joseph Meese (32 years) and Rosalie Meir (30 years) in Ruiselede (West Flanders, Belgium).
- **1858 (November 18):** Birth in Wingene (West Flanders, Belgium) of Ursula, daughter of Joseph Meese (33) and Rosalie Meir (31). Ursula died the same day.
- **1859 (November 20):** Birth in Ruiselede (West Flanders, Belgium) of Prudence, daughter of Joseph Meese (age 34) and Rosalie Meir (age 32).
- **1861 (July 18):** Birth in Ruiselede (West Flanders, Belgium) of Henri, son of Joseph Meese (35) and Rosalie Meir (33). Henri died on July 20.
- **1862 (November 12):** Birth in Ruiselede (West Flanders, Belgium) of Charles, son of Joseph Meese (37) and Rosalie Meir (35).
- **1863 (late December) or 1864 (early January):** Meese family departs with Edouard Simays.
- **1864 (February 4):** The Montreal Ocean Line (Allan Line) ship Bohemian left Liverpool, UK, with the Meese family and Édouard Simays on board.
- **1864 (February 5):** The Bohemian left Londonderry, Ireland.
- **1864 (February 22):** The Bohemian was wrecked near Cape Elizabeth off the coast of Maine, United States of America.
- **1864 (February 25):** The Meese family moved into the home of Edouard Simays at 59 St. Andrew Street in Montreal.
- **1864-1865:** The Meese family moved to Rigaud.
- **1866 (March 14):** Birth in Rigaud (Sainte-Madeleine Parish) of Mathilde, daughter of Joseph Meesen (40) and Rosalie Meir (38). The godfather is the Belgian Léon Cool and the godmother Francisca Isabel Vanthounout.
- **1867 (July 1, baptized July 2):** Birth in Rigaud (St. Madeleine Parish) of Jean (later Jean-Baptiste, John, or Johnny), son of Joseph Meese (age 38) and Rosalie Meir (age 36). The godfather was John Glisson (Gleason) and the godmother Julie Glisson (Gleason).
- **1869 (April 2, baptized April 3):** Birth in Rigaud (St. Madeleine Parish) of Émile, son of Joseph (age 43) and Rosalie Meir (age 41). The godfather was Belgian Émile Cool and the godmother Adeline Turnboom. Father and son are identified as Messen.
- **1870:** The Meese family moved to Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1871 (January 5):** Birth in Longue-Pointe (Montreal) of Marie-Louise, daughter of Joseph Meese (age 45), a day laborer, and Rosalie Meir (age 43). The godfather is Louis Kersse and the godmother Marie Éloïse Guilbault who signed.

- **1873 (February 14, baptized on the 16th):** Birth at Longue-Pointe (Montreal) of Joseph Eusèbe, son of Joseph Meese (age 47), farmer, and Rosalie Meir (age 45). The godfather is Charles Meese and the godmother is Prudence Meese (sign Mess). The priest inscribed the name Mestre for all members of the family.
- **1879 (April 29):** Marriage of Prudence Meese (19) and Ferdinand Martineau at Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1885 (May 2):** Marriage of Mathilde Meese (19 years old) and Joseph Renaud in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1886 (January 19):** Marriage of Charles Meese (23) and Célanire Roy in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1888 (April 2):** Marriage of Émile Meese (19 years old) and Aurore Laurin in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1889 (August 8):** Marriage of Jean-Baptiste (Johnny) Meese (22 years old) and Herméline Vannier at the Montreal Cathedral.
- **1892 (February 23):** Marriage of Marie-Louise Meese (21) and Philias Robert at Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1893 (February 14):** Marriage of Joseph Meese Jr. (age 20) and Melina Faulkner in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1896 (June 12):** Act of naturalization of Joseph Meese (Rosalie Meire automatically becomes naturalized) and Charles Meese in Montreal.
- **1903 (October 29):** Death of Mathilde Meese (37), wife of Joseph Renaud in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1905 (January 19):** Death of Joseph Meese (79), husband of Rosalie Meire in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1912 (December 21):** Death of Émile Meese (43 years old), husband of Aurore Laurin in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).
- **1913 (January 9):** Death of Rosalie Meire (85 years old), widow of Joseph Meese in Longue-Pointe (Montreal).