History of the French-Speaking Settlement in the Cottonwood Valley

Alberta Pantle

Introduction

SETTLEMENT of the French-speaking people in the Cottonwood valley in central Kansas began during the territorial period. The greatest number came from France but there were many Belgians and a few Swiss who came later. They were all considered an integral part of the settlement, which was usually called the French Colony. It was unlike many of the foreign colonies in Kansas in that it was made up of individuals or family groups who arrived at intervals over a period of some 40 years, instead of being a mass immigration.

From 1857, when the first Frenchman settled in the valley, the colony grew steadily until 1885 when there were over 60 families. They were confined largely to Cottonwood township in Chase county, Grant and Doyle townships and the town of Florence in Marion county. In addition, there were at various times several French families in Cottonwood Falls and Marion Centre who allied themselves closely with their countrymen near Florence. They visited them often and attended all the Bastille day celebrations and other social gatherings.

After 1885, few new families came to the settlement. The older residents died and the younger ones intermarried with persons of other nationalities. The colony lost its identity as a French-speaking community and for many years writers have referred to it as the “lost French colony.” It is no more lost, however, than any of the many foreign settlements in Kansas. Descendants still live in the Cottonwood valley and the pioneers themselves rest in the cemeteries near the lands they cultivated so many years ago. They spoke a strange language but they had no racial or religious beliefs which set them apart for any length of time. Most of them were good farmers, good neighbors, and they very easily adapted themselves to life on the Kansas frontier.

In the autumn of 1857, Lievin Daems, Francis Bernard, Solomon Schultz and nine other men whose names are unknown located the town of Cottonwood City in what is now Chase county. Each man had 40 acres in the townsit. It was on the Cottonwood river near the mouth of French creek about two miles northeast of the present

Alberta Pantle is a member of the Library staff of the Kansas State Historical Society.
town of Cedar Point. Daems and Bernard were Frenchmen, as was Michael Frachet, who established a trading post at this place. Cottonwood City was the terminus of the mail route from Cottonwood Falls, and a voting place June 7, 1859.\(^1\) For some reason it did not flourish and eventually the townsite was absorbed into the surrounding farms.

As the years progressed, the center of the colony moved west into Marion county. The homes of the French and Belgian settlers bordered the banks of the Cottonwood river, Cedar creek to the south, and French, Brenot and Martin creeks to the north. The latter two were named for early French settlers. These are the only geographical names of French origin in the vicinity, but there are two landmarks still standing on the banks of the Cottonwood that are reminiscent of the once flourishing colony. One is the former home of Francis Bernard, two miles east of Cedar Point, the other is the home of the Bichet family, three-quarters of a mile west of town. One is in ruins, the other is a beautiful farm home still in possession of a descendant of the original owner, Claude Francis Bichet.

Francis Bernard, Claude Francis Bichet and later his son, Alphonse, played important roles in the establishment of the colony and in the political development of the Cottonwood valley. In the early days disputes among the settlers were taken to one of the three men for arbitration. Consequently, few cases involving Frenchmen are found in the records of the county courts. All through the years their homes were open to new families arriving from Europe. Many times the immigrant found that he did not have enough money saved to buy a farm or establish a home immediately. Sometimes there was difficulty in locating a homestead or in getting a clear title to it. The Bernards or the Bichets were always ready to give a new arrival employment or to help him, in other ways, to get settled.

**Francis Bernard, First Permanent French Settler**

Francis Bernard was born in Dijon, France, April 19, 1821. He was married on May 11, 1852, to his childhood sweetheart, Hermance Senevay, and they came to America two years later. It was commonly believed in the French colony that Mr. Bernard had been forced to leave France because of difficulties over his political activities. This could very well have been true. He was an impetuous man and an ardent Republican. He frequently told of his experiences while fighting in the streets of Paris during the days of the Second Republic and the restoration of the monarchy in 1852, so we know

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1. *Chase County Historical Sketches* (Emporia, 1940), v. 1, pp. 24, 25.
he had taken an active part in the uprisings. By 1854, when the Bernards left France, nearly three million Frenchmen had been deprived of their political rights and over one hundred thousand Republicans had been arrested under one pretext or another. Many had been banished from the country, while countless others had voluntarily exiled themselves to escape persecution and to find a place where personal liberty was assured.

The Bernards lived for a short time in New York City, then went to Kankakee county, Illinois, where they farmed for about a year. In November, 1857, they came to Kansas territory and pre-empted 160 acres of land along the Cottonwood river and Cedar creek east of the present town of Cedar Point. Francis Bernard planned when he came west to establish a French colony and brought with him a stock of goods for a trading post. The idea of the post was abandoned, however, and he settled down to the life of a farmer and stockman.

Within a short time, several Frenchmen had settled near by. Joseph and Charles Portry had come in October, just a month before the Bernards. Francis Godard and Louis Ravenet came in May, 1858, the Bichet family came in August, 1858, and Alexander Louis, a Belgian, came in October of that year.

The old Bernard home stands on the south bank of the Cottonwood near the mouth of French creek. To reach the place today it is necessary to leave the highway and drive through a field, fording a creek which is a short distance from the house. The original log cabin, the home of the Bernards in the earliest days, is still standing and still sturdy. It is on the very bank of the river. The big house is in front of the cabin, a bit farther from the river. Part of the house has been torn down and moved out to the highway where it has been remodeled into a home for the present occupant of the farm. The rest of the house has fallen into decay. The huge fireplace built into the wall between the kitchen and dining room has been removed but the hearth is still there, and the long covered wood box beside it has not been disturbed. It is long enough to have been used for a bed and probably was a great many times.

The barn is standing but rapidly deteriorating. There is enough of it left to tell that it was well built, with siding both inside and out. The yard in front of the house is a tangle of weeds, vines and bushes but here and there are the remnants of flower beds, and the road leading to the ford is lined with a profusion of trumpet vines. People who knew the place in the early days remember Mrs. Bernard's beautifully kept flowers and yard.
Francis Bernard never returned to France, but Mrs. Bernard made several trips to visit her people, and relatives came out to visit them many times. Mr. Bernard became one of the most successful farmers and stockmen of Chase county. He was a stockholder and a director of the Chase County National Bank from its organization in 1882 until his death in 1910.

Francis Bernard has been described as a large man with a booming voice. One of his greatest pleasures was to sing the “Marseillaise” at the Bastille day picnics. He was a generous man. Although the Bernards had no children of their own they liked young folks. They helped the children of many of their neighbors through school or gave them financial aid for other purposes.

The Bernard home was the scene of many bountiful dinners cooked in true French fashion. Even after his wife’s death, it was customary for Mr. Bernard to invite his French friends for Sunday or holiday meals. As late as 1909 the Florence Bulletin carried this news item:

As usual F. Bernard of the East side entertained on Thanksgiving Day with a lavish hand. Besides those from a distance about thirty guests enjoyed his hospitality. Mr. Bernard is 88 years old but his heart is still young and his social entertainments on each recurrent Thanksgiving Day are always the admiration of his friends and neighbors. The guest who dines with Mr. Bernard always fared sumptuously.  

Mrs. Bernard died in January, 1903, and was buried in the Cedar Point cemetery south of town. The following summer Mr. Bernard had a large stone erected at the site of her grave. The base of the monument is white granite and the shaft black granite, forming a pleasing contrast. It bears the following inscription:

Hermance Senevay, wife of Francois Bernard, born in France, November 20, 1833, died January 6, 1903. Came to America 1854, settled in Chase county, Kan., 1857.

She was the first lady settler in this part of the country. Her death was regretted by her husband and friends.

In the autumn of 1909, Mr. Bernard enjoyed a visit from Hippolite and Jacques Clair, his grandnephews from Paris. During their stay the papers carried many items about their activities. They visited friends of the Bernards in Osage City and Reading. On one occasion Mr. Bernard, in spite of his advanced age, took them to Cottonwood Falls to meet his friends there. The young men left Florence on December 11 and were killed, two days later, in the wreck of a Pennsyl-

vania railroad train at Erie, Pa. Their remains were returned to Cedar Point and interred in the cemetery there.

Francis Bernard died October 24, 1910. Both he and his wife were buried from the Presbyterian church at Cedar Point although in the early days they had belonged to the Catholic church. His will is interesting. It begins as follows:

I give to Cottonwood township the house, barn, corncrib and one acre of land on which they are situated in Section 33 of Township 20 of Range 6, commencing at the west line of the section just south of the little creek.

I also give to the same township the S. E. quarter of Section 32 of Township 20 of Range 6 east. I give the above mentioned land and improvements to Cottonwood township to rent or do that which will bring most profit and ½ profit to poor of township and ½ to the preacher of any denomination in said township so long as they believe in Christ.

I also direct that the officers of said township send a man two days of each year to clear and clean my lots at the cemetery of Cedar Point, Kansas, and that every five years they will have the fences painted.

Then followed bequests to friends and relatives. Several of the persons, to whom legacies were given, lived at Osage City. The relatives included Leon and Louise Berton of San Francisco, Cal., a niece, Clothilde Mes de Seine-et-Oise, France, and a nephew, Francois Clair, of Paris. The latter died before the will had been probated.

The Bichet Family

Claude Francis Bichet was born near Dijon, France, February 11, 1812. At the age of 14 or 15 years he enlisted in the navy and served for 15 years. It was customary in the French navy at that time to teach each man some trade. Francis Bichet learned the trade of a “saboteer,” in other words a wooden shoemaker. His pay while he was in the navy was one cent a day.

It is not likely that he was married until after his discharge in 1841. Between the time of his marriage to Sophia Jacques and 1858, the year in which he migrated to America, Francis Bichet worked for a farmer near his home for one dollar a week. After his day’s work

3. Ibid., December 16, 1909.
4. Since the death of the Clair boys, relatives from France have kept a floral piece in the cemetery in memory of them. The present one is a wreath with a small statue of Christ in the center. It is ensared in glass with a steel frame set in cement.
5. Francis Bernard’s will is on file in the office of the probate judge in the Chase county courthouse at Cottonwood Falls.
6. Much of the material on the Bichet family was obtained from a sketch written by Fred A. Bichet of Florence, grandson of Claude Francis Bichet. It was originally written for the late Victor Murdock who planned to include the French colony in his series of historical sketches of Kansas then appearing in the Wichita Eagle. Mr. Murdock died before he had an opportunity to use the sketch and it was returned to Mr. Bichet. The writer of this article owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Bichet, not only for this sketch, but also for their friendly interest and invaluable assistance given during the collecting of material for this story.
in the fields he went home and made wooden shoes. When he had
a wagon load he sold them in the near-by city of Strasburg.

His fondest dream was to bring his family to America. Many
times while he had been in the navy he had visited New Orleans,
New York and other seaport cities in the United States, and he had
made up his mind that he would return there to live. Finally he and
his wife decided they had enough money for the trip and they left
France on February 2, 1858. In the group were Claude Francis
Bichet, his wife, Sophia, their only child, Alphonse, a lad of 12 years,
Mrs. Rosalie Dumartinot and her eight-year-old son, Joseph. After
five weeks in the steerage they arrived in New York. Here a French
agent sent them on to St. Louis where they were to be further ad-
vised about a place to settle. From St. Louis they were sent to St.
Joseph, Mo. Upon their arrival they learned of the Chase county
settlement.

Mr. Bichet spent his last two hundred dollars on an old wagon and
a span of oxen. They set out on the trail to central Kansas. The first
night out one of their oxen wandered off or was stolen. They tried to
find it but encountered so much difficulty in making themselves un-
derstood that they decided to go on with the one remaining. Mr.
Bichet tried to adjust the yoke but it hung down and choked the ox.
The only solution was for someone to walk beside the ox and carry
the other side of the yoke. Mr. and Mrs. Bichet took turns carrying
it all the way to the present Bichet farm, a distance of 180 miles.

Upon their arrival at the small French colony they found a large
group of Cheyenne Indians camped on the land they wished to pre-
empt. Contrary to their expectations, the Indians were friendly and,
at times, even helpful. The Indians stayed on their land for nearly
a year after they came, then moved west.

Until 1862, the Bichets lived in a dugout on the banks of the river.
Then they built a log cabin which is still a part of the present house
on the place. Originally the cabin was covered with walnut siding
cut on the farm. Alphonse Bichet, while not a carpenter by trade,
must have been very handy with tools. The paneled doors and win-
dow frames and the fireplace mantle and trim were attractively fin-
ished and have endured all these years.

In 1875, a two-story stone addition was built. Practically all the
other buildings on the farm are of native stone. About 20 years ago,
John Madden wrote that, “The farm house of native stone, at the end
of a great drive of trees, is a memorial to the Bichet family.”


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the house stands as sturdy and as beautiful as it was when it was built 75 years ago. The cottonwood trees planted by Claude Francis Bichet along the drive leading up to the house have grown to an enormous height. There is probably nowhere in Kansas such a long avenue of cottonwood trees so tall and straight.

During the early days, the Bichet home, even when it consisted of one room with a loft overhead, was the first stopping place of many of the French people coming into the valley. This must have taxed their hospitality, but each newcomer found a cordial welcome at the Bichet place.

As soon as he was old enough, Alphonse Bichet started "working out." His first job was at French Frank's ranch and trading post on the Santa Fe trail. For wages he received a bushel of corn meal each month. At the end of the month he carried the meal home where it was a very acceptable article of food. After Francis Laloge and Peter Martin sold the ranch, Alphonse worked at other jobs on the trail. He also did some government scouting.

On March 18, 1875, Alphonse was married to Mary Stewart at the home of Mrs. Tamiet, the French milliner at Marion Centre. The big house was not built until later in the year, but he brought his bride home to live with his parents in the tiny cabin. Mary Stewart was Irish and she never learned to speak French. The elder Bichets did not know a word of English but the three soon learned to understand each other perfectly.

In 1883, Alphonse Bichet decided to retire from farming. He moved into Florence, taking with him his parents and his own family, which now consisted of his wife, two daughters, Laura, born in 1876, and Amelia, born in 1878, and his son, Fred A., born April 11, 1880.

Claude Francis Bichet died January 18, 1886, at the age of 74 years. Sophia, his wife, lived nearly 20 years longer. She died July 9, 1905.

After his father's death, Alphonse moved back to the farm for a few years. In August, 1887, he made a prospecting trip to Pueblo, Colo., and in September of the same year went to Las Vegas, N. M., with the idea of moving west if the country suited him. Several members of the French colony had gone to Trinidad, Colo., and Mr. Bichet had some business interests there. The Bichets did not leave Marion county until many years later.

Alphonse Bichet was a progressive farmer. As early as 1881 he was experimenting with Clawson wheat. It proved to be a good
producer in the Cottonwood valley and many of his neighbors bought their seed wheat from him. He was a Republican and took a prominent part in the political affairs of the county. He and T. P. Alexander made many trips from Florence to the county seat to attend Republican committee meetings and rallies. In 1887, Mr. Bichet was a candidate for the office of county treasurer but was defeated by J. W. Moore of Durham Park. He was a charter member of the Masonic lodge at Florence. As he grew older, Alphonse Bichet suffered greatly from rheumatism, the result of exposure in pioneer days. He and Mrs. Bichet began to spend the winters in a warmer climate. Sometimes they went to Texas, sometimes to Florida where their son was living, and occasionally to California. In 1923, they moved to San Diego, Cal., where Mr. Bichet died January 27, 1929. He was brought back to Florence and buried beside his parents in Hillcrest cemetery on September 15 of that year.

In an address at the memorial service, John Madden paid tribute to his old friend. Among other remarks, he said:

Alphonse Bichet was a man of superior build, very active and strong, a handsome blond man. He was a welcome guest in the home of every settler, good-natured, kindly, very considerate of the needs and wants of his neighbors. He was loved by all. He was ready to face any danger that menaced the people of his little frontier. He was a general favorite of the young men of that period. They all knew he was ready to meet any emergency and to saddle and ride any hour of the day or night to protect the community from raiding bands of Indians, or lawless white men. . . . He was to my mind a fine type of Frenchman. He embodied all of the finest characteristics of his nation. He could face hardships with courage, always having that abundant hope that would carry him over rough places. He was part of the soul of France, and one of the finest types of American citizens that it has been my good fortune to know.

Mary Stewart Bichet died July 31, 1940, at her home in San Diego. She was 81 years of age. When the estate was being settled up after her death, Fred Bichet bought his sisters’ share of the farm

8. Thomas P. Alexander was born in Eugene, Ind., August 26, 1840. He served in the Eleventh Indiana infantry during the Civil War. In May, 1871, he and his wife, the former Esther Stewart, came to Florence where he owned and operated a hardware store for many years. Mr. Alexander kept a diary from 1885 until the year of his death, 1915. It was published some years ago in the Florence Bulletin and is a valuable source of information on the people of Florence and vicinity.

9. John Madden, a prominent lawyer and politician of the state, lived in Marion and Chase counties from 1865 until 1893 when he moved to Emporia. He studied law under the Hon. J. Ware Butterfield, of Florence, and was admitted to the bar of Kansas in 1878.


11. Fred Bichet, the only son of Alphonse and Mary Stewart Bichet, enlisted in the 40th Hospital corps, U. S. army, in September, 1899. After he came home from the Philippines he was on patrol duty on the Mexican border until September, 1902. While he was in service he had a broken leg, a sunstroke, and, as he expresses it, all the tropical diseases one man could carry off. Had it not been for this misfortune he might have settled on the old farm and become a farmer and stockman as his father and grandfather before him. Farm labor, he says, is the life for him, and he studied pharmacy in the question he studied pharmacy.

In September, 1905, he was married to Edna Van Way of Winfield. After his marriage he owned drugstores in several central Kansas towns. About 1907, they moved to Auburn-
at Cedar Point. In attempting to clear the title, he found that the patent for the 40 acres in Chase county had never been recorded. It was necessary to get a copy of the original patent from Washington before the land could be transferred. The fact that this farm has been in possession of one family continuously since 1858 is an unusual record for land ownership in that part of Kansas.

LOUIS RAVENET, GENTLEMAN

Louis Ravenet settled in what is now Doyle township of Marion county in May, 1858. He lived there for a number of years on his farm along the Cottonwood river west of Cedar Point. His name appears in the census reports up to 1870 and in records of land transactions for a year or two longer. John Madden, in an article on the French colony, says that Ravenet was a man of culture, wellborn, and like Victor Hugo—an exile. The coup d'état of Napoleon was distasteful to him so he found his way to Kansas. His old farm, joining the Bichet land on the west, had a setting of wood, valley and stream. The wood extended up to the steep escarpment of a rocky hill on the south side of the river and was one of the beauty spots in the Valley. The old log cabin is gone and so is the cultured gentleman who filled it with books and works of art.12

Louis Ravenet was long spoken of with an air of mystery. That his name was not really Ravenet and that he had returned to France to reclaim his estate when the Third Republic was established, was a favorite story when the Frenchmen of the valley got together to talk over early times. Mr. Madden did not believe that the name was assumed. He says rather that Louis Ravenet was “a gallant gentleman who bore the Raven in his family crest since the days of Rollo the Norman—‘Chevalier sans peur, et sans reproche.’”

JOHN BRENOT

John Brenot was another early settler about whom we know very little. There seems to be no record of the date of his settlement on the creek which still bears his name. One of his children, buried in the Cedar Point cemetery, died September 3, 1858, so he was living there at least that early. The Bruno creek bridge on Highway 50S is
dale, Fla., where they lived for a number of years. In the 1920's they lived for several years in San Diego, Cal., where Mr. Bichet was general foreman of the operating department of the city. Florence, Kan., is now their home although they spend many of the winter months in the South.

Their only son, Stewart A. Bichet, was born in Florence, December 14, 1906. He studied civil engineering at Heald College, Oakland, Cal. After graduation he worked with the U.S. engineers in the building of the Harvey locks at New Orleans, the Vermillion locks on the Intercoastal canal in Louisiana, and the Calcasieu river channel from Lake Charles, La., to the Gulf of Mexico. During World War II he supervised the construction of the air base to defend the Panama canal at Kingston, Jamaica. It was here he contracted the tropical disease which caused his death on February 23, 1948. He left his wife, the former Celeste Reyes, of New Orleans, and two children, Fred A., II, and Betty Ann.13. Chase County Historical Sketches (Emporia, 1940), v. 1, p. 91.
practically on the Marion-Chase county line. John Brenot built his cabin a short distance up the creek in what is now Marion county. In 1860 this locality was designated as Marion township of Chase county. John Brenot and his wife were the only native French people living in the township in that year.

The Brenots were the only settlers on the creek in 1861. They were not far from the small French settlement on the Cottonwood to the south but north and west of them there were no settlers for many miles and then only a few families at the present site of Marion.

On January 10, 1861, snow fell to a depth of two feet and remained on the ground for a whole month. Because of the extreme cold and lack of forage, buffalo came into the valley by the hundreds. On January 20 a buffalo hunt was organized. C. C. Smith and O. H. Drinkwater, living near present Cedar Point, killed six of the animals just north of the John Brenot farm.

During the Civil War, John Brenot freighted for the government. In August, 1864, he was hauling corn to Fort Lyon. While he was encamped at Cow creek ranch, probably in present Rice county, the Indians attacked the train. His two teamsters, William Cramer and another man whose name is unknown, were out herding the oxen. They narrowly escaped death. William Cramer was badly wounded. The Indians killed 24 head of Brenot’s oxen. He also lost a good pony which had been a gift to his wife from her father.

John Brenot has been described as a short, dark man, restless and quick tempered. There were six children listed in the census of 1875 and at least two had died. In 1879, they moved to Franklin county, perhaps to Silkville, although no record has been found. A year or two later they went to California where John Brenot died within a few years. Mrs. Brenot and some of the children came back to visit a time or two but no one has heard of the family for many years.

13. C. C. Smith came to present Chase county, Kansas, in 1856 and settled in the Cottonwood valley near Cedar Point. He acquired considerable wealth as a farmer and stockman and at the time of his death, August 4, 1918, was said to have owned some 2,000 acres of valley land.—Ibid., pp. 391, 392.

14. Orlo H. Drinkwater came from Pennsylvania to Kansas in 1855 and located near Topeka on land owned by Abram Burnett, chief of the Pottawatomie Indians. He took an active part in the Free-State movement. In the fall of 1857 he settled in the Cottonwood valley. In his diary, excerpts of which are printed in the Chase County Historical Sketches (Vol. 1) he says: “There were very few white settlers in the Cottonwood Valley at that time. It was government land but was the hunting grounds of the Kaws, Osages and other reservation Indians that lived farther east. The country was full of deer and antelope and wild turkeys, and sometimes buffaloes came into the Valley.” O. H. Drinkwater laid off the town of Cedar Point and had a post office established on his farm in 1862. He built and operated the first mill at Cedar Point. He died October 8, 1912.—Ibid., pp. 183-186.

15. Emporia News, August 20, 1864.
The Louis Family

The only Belgian to settle permanently in the colony during the territorial period was Charles Alexander Louis. He was born in Brussels in December, 1828. In 1854, he came to the United States and lived in Wisconsin until October, 1858, when he came to Chase county. Alexander Louis and Eliza Jane Creamer were married at El Dorado, March 4, 1865.

Mrs. Louis was born in Indiana, June 15, 1848. When she was 11, her parents moved to Missouri and a few years later removed to Butler county, Kansas. The Louis’ lived in Butler county for a short time, then moved to a farm on the Marion-Chase county line south of Cedar Point. In 1868, they took a claim three miles east and one mile north of Florence. This was their home for the remainder of their lives. Alexander Louis died February 17, 1907. Mrs. Louis died March 15, 1932.

There was a large family, mostly boys. Mrs. Louis was an invalid for many years, so much of the responsibility of raising the family fell upon Mr. Louis. When the children were small he not only did his own work in the fields but had to do the housework, the cooking, canning, washing and caring for the family.

During the period of the Civil War the colony did not grow. The Kansas state census for 1865 lists only eight French and Belgian families living in Doyle and Cottonwood townships. They were:

DOYLE TOWNSHIP, MARION COUNTY

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<th>Age</th>
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<td>Rancher</td>
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<td>E. J.</td>
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COTTONWOOD TOWNSHIP, CHASE COUNTY

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<tr>
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<td>A.</td>
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16. Six of the Louis’ sons, John, Alex., Charles, Emil, Ed and Fred settled near Florence, Rudolph lived in Barber county for many years. Mary E. Louis, the oldest daughter, married Robert Stewart, a nephew of Mrs. Alphonse Bichet. She died in Trinidad, Colo., in 1890. Jessie, the youngest daughter, married Ed Schroer and lived in Marion county.
Joseph and Charles Portry, Eugene and Rosanna Gurer, Francis Goddard and the Frachets, listed in the 1860 census, had left the community. Presumably Louis Ravenet was missed by the census enumerator because he lived on his farm in Doyle township until after 1870. Hallock is probably a misspelling of Hallotte. They were relatives of Mrs. Francis Laloige. A Joseph Hallotte married Lucinda Cramer in Chase county on November 15, 1866. A John Hallotte also lived in the valley in the early days. He was a government scout for many years.

**The Laloiges and Peter Martin**

Francis Laloige and Peter Martin began farming in the Cottonwood valley in 1864 or 1865. Their stories are interesting. Francis Laloige, with 15 other young men, left France June 10, 1857. They landed at New Orleans July 22. Francis took a partner, Peter Martin, another young Frenchman who had probably come to America on the same ship. Both got jobs at a baker's shop and worked for a year. Then they went to Louisville, Ky., where they worked for another year. In July, 1859, they came to Kansas and Peter Martin got a job on the Santa Fe trail. Francis Laloige went on to Pike's Peak to dig for gold. He stayed there about a year, spent all his money and walked back to Kansas.

After his return Laloige got a job at one of the stations on the Santa Fe trail. In 1861, he quit this job and started a trading post on a ranch at Cottonwood hole a few miles south and west of Moore's ranch at Cottonwood crossing. These two ranches, with a third owned by a man named Smith at Lost Springs, were the only ranches on the Santa Fe trail in what is now Marion county. The Laloige store was known as French Franks. Peter Martin again became his partner and together they ran the post for several years. Martin usually stayed at the ranch while Francis Laloige went west to trade with the Indians or east into Chase county to buy produce for the store.

On one of these trips he met a young French girl, Mary Eugenie Hallotte, who had come from Ohio with her parents in 1860. On May 10, 1863, they were married at the home of J. Hallotte in the town of Cottonwood.

17. Information on the Laloige family was obtained, in part, from sketches by Claude and Francis Laloige in the Chase County Historical Sketches, v. 1, pp. 266-269.
The Lalogaes returned to the ranch on the trail to live. By this time the Indians on the frontier were becoming hostile. “French Frank” was accustomed to trading with them and had always found them friendly but the Indians who came to the trading post now were insolent and demanding. One day Satanta and some of his braves came in and threatened the lives of the traders. Laloge told them that if they did not leave he would blow up a keg of powder even though it meant death to all of them. The Indians left but he knew they would soon return and would not be so easily frightened again. In a short time he had a chance to sell the ranch and the Laloge family and Peter Martin moved to farms near Cedar Point.

The Lalogaes bought a farm at the junction of Cedar and Coon creeks in 1869. This was their home for the remainder of their lives. Francis Laloge died there June 30, 1899, and Mary Hallotte Laloge died on February 14, 1911.

Mr. Laloge was township treasurer for a number of years and served as county commissioner one or two terms. He took a prominent part in the various French societies that were organized through the years.

There were five sons in the Laloge family: Joseph, Francis, Claude, Peter, and Louis who died in infancy.

Peter Martin took a homestead on Cedar creek. On March 1, 1868, he was married to Rosalie Dumartinot, a widow, who with her son, Joseph, had come to Kansas with the Bichets in 1858. Rosalie Martin died December 3, 1872. Soon after her death, Peter Martin left the community and no one now remembers where he went or whether he was ever heard from again.

After the arrival of the Lalogaes and Martin, no more French people came into the valley until late in the 1860’s. The Civil War stopped practically all foreign immigration. Also, conditions on the Kansas frontier were such that settlers from other states were not attracted to the area.

**THE 1860’s: FRONTIER LIFE, AND INDIAN DEPREDACTIONS**

Living conditions in the little settlement during the first few years were difficult. The nearest grist mill was at Emporia, some 60 miles distant. Supplies had to be hauled from there or from Council Grove which was only a few miles closer. After the Bichets built their house in 1862, they used blankets at the windows. Finally they decided to put in real window frames and panes. Alphonse was sent to Council Grove for them. He went with a neighbor, but after they
got to the Grove, the neighbor decided to go on to Leavenworth with his team. The boy bought the windows and walked the entire distance back home with them on his shoulders. His son, Fred A. Bichet, of Florence, still has these windows, although they have been replaced in the house itself.

During drought years the buffalo came off the plains, foraging for food. Hay stacks had to be fenced against them so the farmers would have feed for their livestock. Except for the dry year of 1860, there were no crop failures because of lack of rain. The land in the Cottonwood valley is rich, fertile and well-watered.

The Indians, comparatively friendly in territorial days, became a source of annoyance, if not an actual menace, during the Civil War and for several years afterwards. Francis Bernard, in later years, often told the story of one of his encounters with the Red men.

One day five or six Indians came to his cabin and demanded to see his wife. Perhaps, because Mrs. Bernard was one of the few white women in that part of the country, they really wanted only to see her, but Mr. Bernard, fearing for her safety, could not be sure. He told them she was away from home for a visit. Barring the doors and windows of the tiny cabin, he had Mrs. Bernard crawl between the two feather mattresses on their bed and there she stayed for three days. The Indians waited outside, peering through the window at frequent intervals to see whether he had told them the truth. When it came time for him to eat his meals he ate at the edge of the bed so he could give Mrs. Bernard some of the food as the opportunity arose.

The French colony was on the fringe of settlement. O. H. Drinkwater, one of the earliest settlers on the present townsite of Cedar Point, had a fortified building which was frequently referred to as Fort Drinkwater. Here the settlers gathered for protection when there was an Indian scare. On several occasions, when the reports were particularly alarming, they went on to Shafts, about ten miles above Cottonwood Falls. On July 20, 1864, Ed Miller, a young boy of Marion Centre, was sent to take a message to the E. P. Waterman family at Running Turkey ranch on the Santa Fe trail west of Cottonwood crossing.18 Ed stopped for a few minutes at French Frank's ranch. Alphonse Bichet who was working there at the time rode a mile or two with him then turned back to the ranch. He was the last person to see the boy alive. Three days later a searching party

18. Marion Record, January 11, 1912.
found his body near the present Marion-McPherson county line. He had been killed and scalped by the Indians.

Until late in the fall of that year there were numerous Indian scares. The Emporia News reported on July 30, 1864:

We have just recovered from one of those incidents of our present unsettled conditions, “a scare.” It did not come from the Bushwhackers this time, but from the Indians on the plains. From the demonstrations at different times this summer from the Indians, it was easy to make the people believe that the reports were true.

The direct cause of the alarm here was the following dispatch from Col. Smith, of the 8th militia, dated at Cottonwood Falls, on Sunday night, and addressed to Col. A. J. Mitchell, of the Eleventh militia:

“The reports are very alarming from the upper Cottonwood in regard to the Indians. The settlers have all left their homes, and are in camp at Shaft’s, ten miles above here. Twenty-five men are killed as far as heard from. Every man in Chase, Butler and Marion will be in the saddle tonight. We expect you to help us, and that at once, as the case is one of urgency. Morris county militia will all be on the road tonight. Should you see fit to send a detachment, send up the Cottonwood to the crossing of the road, and there you will get information to control further action. Don’t fail to help us, as there is great danger. The Indians are already on the head of Cottonwood. Gen. Wood is out of the District, and I think you are in command of the 5th District. W. S. Starr

Col. 8th K.S.M.”

This dispatch arrived here about 2 o’clock Monday morning, and Col. Mitchell and Lieut Col. Bunch both being absent at Leavenworth, was sent to Major Abraham. He immediately called out the regiment, and at an early hour Monday morning was on his way, with nearly two hundred men, up the Cottonwood. The forces consisted of parts of Co. A, under command of Lieut. Humphrey; Co. B, under Capt. Elliott; Co. C, under Capt. Campbell; Co. D, under Capt. Hill; and Co. H, under command of Lieut. Burton. Co. E, under Capt. Harper, and Co. F, under Capt. McGinnis, followed in the evening. Lieut. Wilson, who is stationed here with part of Co. A, 15th Kas. Cav., also started early in the morning. In the meantime reports kept coming in of the frightful state of affairs. A lady came from Smoky Hill, stating that the Indians had commenced murdering the settlers in that region. Another report was that a large train was corralled between Cow Creek and the Arkansas, and were being starved out, and that the Santa Fe stage had been captured, and the Indians had possession of Fort Larned, etc., etc.

The command under Major Abraham proceeded to the Santa Fe crossing. They found a good many settlers at Shaft’s, as stated by Col. Smith. Some had got over the scare and returned to their homes, while others were about to do so. The command arrived at the Cottonwood crossing Tuesday evening, at 6 o’clock. The Santa Fe stage had arrived a few minutes before and reported that they had seen no Indians between that and Fort Larned. They had passed about 300 militia from Chase and Morris counties, who had turned back. Major Abraham and Lieut. Wilson being unable to hear any news that would warrant them in going on, and the former having no provisions, they turned back, and arrived home Thursday about noon.
It seems there was some grounds for these rumors. The Indians had run off all the horses and mules at all the ranches and stations between the Cottonwood crossing and Pawnee Fork, and several persons have been killed. A band of Indians was seen several miles below the Cottonwood crossing of the Santa Fe road, and it is supposed they were scouts, and when they saw the demonstrations on the part of the people and military authorities, reported to the main body, when the trains were released and the red-skins scattered. There is no doubt but that the plains in that direction are full of Indians, and they must be watched very closely to prevent great mischief. Great credit is due the militia for the promptness with which they turned out, and the determination which they evinced to meet the Indians and drive them back had they really invaded the settlements. This demonstration on their part shows they are ready to defend their homes.

On September 10, 1864, the Emporia News reported, "We are informed that the settlers in Marion county, west of here some sixty miles, are leaving their homes and coming this way for protection." The settlers around Cedar Point again assembled at "Fort Drinkwater" and from there went to Cottonwood Falls.

This is the last recorded evidence of Indian trouble in the Cottonwood valley. For several years, however, marauding bands of Indians came at night and stole cattle and horses. The Indian depredation claims, on file in the U. S. office of Indian affairs, list the names of many of the Cedar Point farmers. Alexander Louis and Alphonse Bichet were among those of the French colony who filed claims for stolen or damaged property. Some of these claims were disallowed but some were paid by the Federal government as late as 1898.

In one raid in 1867, a large number of horses were stolen from the valley by the Keechie (or Kichai) Indians. Alphonse Bichet, O. H. Drinkwater and several others, whose horses were taken, followed the trail and found their horses near the present site of Wichita. They were able to recover nearly all of them. Stories of the recovery have become legend. One version is that the men found another tribe camped near the Keechies, approaching these Indians they offered $5 for every horse returned to them. That night the camp of the Keechies was raided and practically all of the stolen horses were delivered to the Cedar Point men.

**The 1870's: New Arrivals**

Louis E. Berton, the son of Francois Claude and Jeanne Marie (Bajard) Berton, was born in Paris, France, June 6, 1852. When he was 17 years of age, he came to America to visit his uncle Francis Bernard. A few years later he returned to France to bring his
mother to this country. In 1880, they were living on a farm in Cottonwood township, Chase county. On March 10, 1881, he was married to Marie Leonie Marcelot, the daughter of a French farmer living near by.

Mrs. Berton, the mother of Louis E. Berton, died September 2, 1882, and was buried in the Cedar Point cemetery. Some time later Louis E. Berton and his wife moved to California. Mrs. Berton's father, Paul Marcelot, and his two children, Melanie and Henry, went with them.

Paul Marcelot had come to this country from the Department de L'Yonne, Ville de Vezelay, France. His wife died during the voyage to America and was buried at sea. Arriving in New York with his three motherless children, he set out to bring them to central Kansas. He bought a farm in Doyle township and farmed there until 1882 when he went to California with the Bertons. Paul Marcelot later went to Panama to work for the French company which was then attempting to build a canal across the Isthmus. He died there August 5, 1887.

Marie Leonie Berton died in Napa county, California, September 2, 1887, and her sister a year later. Both died of tuberculosis. Henry Marcelot, their brother, died of the same disease many years later.

Louis E. Berton died in San Francisco, February 19, 1902. His children, Leon and Louise, are the last descendants of the two French families, Berton and Marcelot, who once lived in Kansas. They live in San Francisco at the present time.19

Other names in the French colony in 1870 were: Rassat, Teuta, de Pardonnet, Fortuna, Marcou, Stiker and Ferlet. Jack Teuta was the only one of this group who lived in the neighborhood for the remainder of his life.

Frank Rassat and his wife, Josephine, and the Stikers lived there for some 15 or 20 years. We know nothing more of Jacques Fortuna. The Ferlets, Stephen Marcou, George de Pardonnet and Frederick Teuta soon left but all had interesting histories.

**French Innkeepers: the Ferlets**

August Ferlet was born in Burgundy, France, in 1831. He married Rosa Garcon in Paris in 1858 and they lived in LeRoi, France, for four years. In 1862, they came to America, landing at New Orleans. Their first home in the United States was at Farmington,

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19. Information on the Berton and Marcelot families was furnished by Louise Berton in a letter dated, San Francisco, Cal., October 7, 1949.
Wis. In 1870, they came to Kansas and homesteaded a farm north of Cedar Point.

In 1873, August Ferlet was sued by Stephen Marcou for possession of a heifer which Ferlet thought Marcou had given him nearly three years before. Marcou denied the gift and thus started one of the most unusual lawsuits Chase county has ever had. The case was tried before one court and then another until finally one jury found in favor of Ferlet, and some $150 in costs were assessed against Marcou. Marcou appealed the case to the district court.

Col. S. N. Wood and Father Perrier, of the Catholic church, worked on the case and finally solved it in this fashion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All the suits are dismissed, Marcou paying half the costs</td>
<td>$166.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferlet keeps the heifer and donates to the Catholic church at Cedar Point</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pays half the costs</td>
<td>166.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His own attorney fees</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$453.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The account in the paper goes on to say that "the heifer was sold last week for $16.00 on six months credit." The costs in the case would have been considerably more if Stephen Marcou had not acted as his own attorney.

By the time the case was settled, August Ferlet was ready to leave the country. Having received an offer to teach French in a college at Staunton, Va., he rented his farm and left, with his family, for that place in May, 1873.

Just two years later, the Ferlets returned to Chase county and settled in Cottonwood Falls. On May 16, 1875, they purchased the Falls House, one of the early-day hotels in that town. The Falls House was remodeled and enlarged, apparently with the idea of attracting the drummer trade. The first floor contained an office, a sample room and a sitting room. The second floor had bedrooms and a parlor. The hotel, renamed the Union Hotel, proved to be one of the most popular stopping places for travelers in central Kansas. The Florence Tribune for January 3, 1885, says that "A. Ferlet . . . is one of the most genial hosts in our knowledge. He has held his custom through times of misfortune as well as in seasons of plenty, and the steady increase in his travelling custom is the best testimony of his agreeable accommodations."

One of the early employees at the Union House was James E. Hurley. He came to Cottonwood Falls in 1875 looking for a job.

20. Chase County Leader, Cottonwood Falls, May 9, 1873.
August Ferlet hired him but before he began work Mrs. Ferlet took the half-starved boy to the kitchen and fed him. At first Jim Hurley did odd jobs around the hotel. One of his first jobs was to get two of Mrs. Ferlet’s chickens out of a well. After working for hours to get them out they hit upon the idea of lowering one of the Ferlet boys down in one of the well buckets. He rescued the chickens and carried them to safety.

The Ferlets found Jim Hurley dependable and agreeable. He soon advanced to driver of the Union Hotel bus. After a few months, during which Hurley won many friends for himself and the hotel, he quit his job and became baggage man at the Santa Fe station. This was the beginning of his career as a railroad man which was to lead to the general managership of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company.

August and Rosa Ferlet took some months off for visiting and sightseeing in 1893 but they came back to run the hotel until August’s death, May 2, 1899. Mrs. Ferlet died on August 30, 1917. They had four children.21

THE ERRATIC MR. MARCOUR

We do not know when Stephen G. Marcou settled in the Cottonwood valley. He was living in Doyle township with his mother, Constance, in 1870. He was then 31 years of age.

Of his activities in the valley, we know little except for his part in the lawsuit with August Ferlet which has already been described. On May 24, 1871, he wrote a letter to Governor Harvey saying that he had called at his office that day and, finding the governor away, had left letters from A. A. Moore of Marion Centre, and O. H. Drinkwater of Cedar Point.22

21. The Ferlets children were: Anatole, Leopold, Edward R. and Rosalene. Anatole, or “Tony,” as he was always called, learned the printer’s trade under W. A. Morgan, editor of the Chase County Leader. He left Cottonwood Falls at an early date and, after working in St. Louis for a few years, went to San Antonio, Tex., where he established a job printing establishment. He was so successful his brother, Leo, joined him in the business. Later they moved their printery to El Paso.

Tony Ferlet was killed many years ago in an accident caused by a runaway team. His brother continued the business. Leo Ferlet was a charter member of the El Paso Rotary Club. When the club celebrated its quarter-century anniversary some years ago he was given a silver plaque for having a perfect attendance for the entire 25 years.

Edward R. Ferlet farmed in Greenwood county after he left home. In 1900, he returned to Cottonwood Falls and operated a hardware store. Six years later he again left and eventually settled in Kansas City, Mo., where he was engaged in the real estate business for many years.

Rosalene Ferlet, the only one of the children born in Cottonwood Falls, took a secretarial course when she finished high school. She worked in Topeka for several years. Just before World War I she took a trip to France. After the war she secured a secretarial position with Anne Morgan in her rehabilitation work in France. When that job was ended she stayed on in Paris with some of her mother’s people. She was working for the Adams Express Company when she died, quite unexpectedly, in 1929. She was buried in Paris.

22. The Marcou correspondence is on file in the Archives division of the Kansas State Historical Society.
Marcou further stated that he was on his way to France to lecture in the principal cities on the subject of Kansas and her opportunities with the object of inducing the immigration of French people to the state. He asked the governor to write to President Grant asking for a letter of recommendation to Elihu Washburne, then United States minister to France. Marcou was on his way east and he asked the governor to address his reply in care of F. I. Doremus, Chatham, Morris county, N. J.

We have no record of Governor Harvey's reply but he must have been agreeable to the project because, on June 5, 1871, Stephen G. Marcou was appointed Kansas emigration agent to France.

If Mr. Marcou went to France at this time, he did not stay long. On September 25, 1871, the Marion County Record reprinted an item from the Poughkeepsie (N. Y.) Daily Press to the effect that Stephen G. Marcou, a resident of southwestern Kansas, delivered an address from the city hall steps to the working men of the city urging them to "go west." Marcou's whereabouts for the next few months are unknown, however, so he may not have gone abroad until after he was in Poughkeepsie.

How successful Marcou's lectures were in inducing Frenchmen to migrate to Kansas is not known. In 1873, a French family settled in Marion Centre and the Marion County Record says that they came as a result of Mr. Marcou's recommendation.

In the summer of 1873, Marcou took up his residence in Marion Centre. He was not destined to remain long but there is little doubt that he was one of the most enterprising men who ever lived there.

First, he set himself up as an attorney. He offered his professional services free to anyone who was unable to pay. Every court docket listed several cases in which Marcou represented one side or the other. Several times he acted as his own attorney as he had done in the Marcou-Ferlet case. On some occasions he defended his fellow countryman, John Brenot, whom he always referred to as "My friend, John Brenot."

One would suspect that Marcou went out of his way to create situations out of which lawsuits might arise. One time John Brenot was arrested for a minor infraction of the law. There seemed to be no easy way to get him out of his difficulties. A few days later the sheriff, Samuel Howe, was sued for false arrest and imprisonment. Marcou had discovered that no bond had been filed for the sheriff for that term of office. The matter was referred to the
governor who, after consulting with the attorney general, advised Mr. Howe to resign. He was thereupon reappointed by the governor and a proper bond posted. In the meantime the charges against Brenot had been dropped.

Marcou was a brilliant and clever lawyer but his tactics were oftentimes the despair of the other lawyers practicing in Marion Centre at that time. E. W. Hoch, in the Marion County Record for December 29, 1876, repeated this courtroom incident:

Marcou was opposed by A. E. Case,23 then a practicing attorney, now cashier of the Cottonwood Valley Bank, and his partner, S. R. Peters,24 now judge of the District. Mr. Case, in his quaint way, dryly expressed the belief, that if Marcou should die and go below, he would get up a row and be expelled from old Nick's domains within a week. The ready-witted Frenchman quickly retorted, that if Case should go there, the devil would do as Mr. Peters had done—go into partnership with him.

Mr. Hoch added that the joke had never been published before and if any newspapers wished to copy it they should do so at once for he had an idea Mr. Case would make a desperate effort to suppress it.

Not content with his law practice, Marcou opened a real estate office. He ran large advertisements in the Marion County Record and the Chase County Leader. He advertised land in Chase and Marion county and town lots in Marion, Florence and Cedar Point. For several weeks he ran his advertisement in English, German and French. Apparently he advertised well because in one week he received 47 letters of inquiry about property he had for sale.

In October, 1873, Marcou set up a sales agency. Included in his advertisement in the Record for November 22, 1873, were one yoke of No. 1 Texas work cattle, one threshing machine, four thousand fence posts. On January 10, 1874, the paper reported that S. G. Marcou has contracted for space for his sales agency and added, “His sales agency has already become a permanent institution . . . and that in connection with his land and law business would swamp almost any other man.”

23. Alexander E. Case was born at Canton, Bradford county, Pa., October 1, 1838, the son of Ephraim and Mary (Bothwell) Case. He served in the Union army from 1861 to 1865. In 1866 he came to Marion Centre which at that time consisted of 19 log shanties. Mr. Case became the first county surveyor and in 1869 platted the present townsite of Marion Centre. He was admitted to the bar and served for a time as county attorney of Marion county. In the early 1870’s he was appointed Santa Fe land agent and was instrumental in settling many Mennonite groups in that section of Kansas.

On December 12, 1869, he was married to Mary Moulton. She died in 1889 leaving two sons, Rosse and Frank. On June 25, 1884, he was married to Maria H. Wooster. He died January 3, 1929.—Marion Record, January 10, 1929.

24. Samuel Ritter Peters located in Marion Centre in 1873 and practiced law there for a short time. In 1876 he was judge of the ninth judicial district. He was prominent politically in Kansas for many years.
Mrs. Francis Bernard  
(1833-1903)

Francis Bernard  
(1821-1910)

Alphonse Bichet  
(1846-1929)

Mrs. Alphonse Bichet  
(1859-1940)

Francis Laloce  
(1831-1899)

Pictures courtesy of Fred A. Bichet of Florence.
Mr. Marcou evidently was not “swamped” because he found time to make speeches and write lengthy letters for publication in the local papers. He also found time to compile and publish a 15-page pamphlet entitled *Homes for the Homeless. A Description of Marion Co., Kansas, and the Cottonwood Valley, the Garden of the State*. It was printed in the offices of the *Marion County Record*.25

His speeches were, for the most part, made for the benefit of the Catholics in Marion Centre and vicinity. They were attempting at this time to organize and build a church in Marion Centre. On January 3, 1874, the paper reported that there had been a meeting of the Catholics to discuss the problems of erecting a church building. Addresses were made by Messrs. Marcou, Brenot, etc. A Marion Centre Catholic Church Association was formed with a capital stock of $1,000. Trustees for the first year were Jno. M. Henn, Chas. Verling and S. G. Marcou. A contract was let for the building and some time later a small frame building was erected.

Marcou’s pet dream for Marion Centre was to have sidewalks in the business district. Some of the merchants had built walks in front of their stores but they were not uniform in height or width and the spaces in between were muddy when it rained. The only way to have proper sidewalks was to have the town incorporated. Marcou began talking and writing incorporation. When the rains came he donned seven-foot stilts and walked about the town on them to tantalize the opponents of his incorporation scheme. He apparently talked sidewalks everywhere he went, because on February 20, 1874, the *Chase County Leader* had this to say:

S. G. Marcou, formerly of this county but now of Marion Centre, came near losing his life by drowning, one day last week. While crossing Main street, in that town, he stepped into a mudhole, the bottom of which had fallen out, and but for the providential proximity of some logs, which were shoved out to him, he would now be in that bourn from which no lawyer was ever known to return.

Things were not going too well with Mr. Marcou. In March, he intimated that he was having trouble with what he called the “Marion Centre ring.” His advertisements ceased to appear in May and the *Chase County Leader* for the 22, carried this item: “S. G. Marcou, the erratic, has left Marion Centre and gone to Colorado. Some time ago he said he would bust the ring in the Centre or get busted, and from the unceremonious manner of his leaving we suppose the latter event happened.”

25. A copy of the pamphlet is in the Library of the Kansas State Historical Society.
Thus Marion Centre lost one of her most colorful citizens. Stephen Marcou dressed in the height of fashion, it is said, and was always immaculately groomed. He drove a "spanking pair" of horses hitched to an elegant buggy but he lived in a dugout on the banks of Mud creek. He had dreams of making Marion Centre over into a charming village such as those he remembered in France. He was eccentric and, at times, unethical, but he must have been sincere else he would not have put forth so much effort to attain his ideals.

So far as it is known he was never heard of again except on one occasion. In 1876, A. A. (Lank) Moore wrote that he had "recently seen Stephen Marcou, ex-realestate man from your town. I saw him on the summit of the highest mountain on the Pacific slope, headed west, and looking hearty and fine."

GEORGE DE PARDONNET: PROMOTER OF IMMIGRATION

George de Pardonnet lived in the Cottonwood valley seven years, probably from about 1867 to 1872. Governor Harvey appointed him special immigration agent in Europe for Kansas in 1872. At the same time he was to act as agent for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad Company which was attempting, as were the other railroads in Kansas, to induce foreign residents to come to Kansas to settle on their lands.

The appointment was made by the governor with the understanding, on de Pardonnet's part at least, that the Kansas legislature would follow up the appointment with an appropriation to finance the project. For some reason the legislature did not co-operate.

George de Pardonnet went to Europe confident that the appropriation would be forthcoming. He established an elaborate office at 2 Rue d' Amsterdam in Paris. On June 9, 1874, he wrote Governor Osborn:

... The results I have obtained during the last fortnight are excellent. I shall send off a lot of French emigrants on the 10th and 15th of this month and every day for the last month I have been sending off one or two families regularly for Kansas, nearly all of them with sufficient means to start at once, and many good and intelligent workmen.

For the end of the month I have a large quantity of German and Swiss emigrants whom I engaged at Basle and a certain quantity of Alsatian-Lorraine and Belgians who will leave by Antwerp. 26

He also wrote that he had started, at his own expense, a special agency at Antwerp exclusively for the State of Kansas. His assistant at this agency was his youngest brother-in-law, Frederick

26. The de Pardonnet correspondence with the governor is on file in the Archives division of the Kansas State Historical Society.
Teuty, who had been with him when he lived on his farm in the Cottonwood valley.

De Pardonnet had spent, so he wrote, several thousand dollars of his own and, in addition, part of Madame de Pardonnet’s fortune. The only help he was getting from Kansas was $225 a month from the M. K. & T. “irregularly payed.”

In a letter to Governor Osborn dated August 1, de Pardonnet complained that
certain French residents of Topeka 27 who have a long time entertained a deep hatred for me have said, written and had published in New York and Europe, that I was not Special Immigration Agent in Europe for the State of Kansas . . . in spite of my three commissions, the first signed by your predecessor, Hon. J. M. Harvey, who knows me well and the last by yourself 15 February, 1873; 9 February, 1874.

As a result of these articles de Pardonnet had been called in by a French government official and asked to explain his position. This he had been able to do satisfactorily.

In spite of these difficulties, de Pardonnet still expected to continue his work. He had by then expended $6,000 of his own money and established agencies in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Italy.

He had caused to be printed “thousands and in many languages” pamphlets, views and cards upon Kansas. One of these pamphlets is in the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Within a week after this letter was written, on September 7, 1874, Governor Osborn revoked de Pardonnet’s commission. A certified copy of the revocation of the commission was sent to Hamilton Fish, Secretary of State of the United States, asking him to forward it to the proper authorities in France.

Secretary Fish replied that, in view of the fact that de Pardonnet was not an officer of the government of the United States, it was not within its province or that of any of the agents of the United States in France to communicate the revocation to any authorities in France. In an unofficial and private letter he explained that some European countries, especially Germany and France, had shown a repugnance to agencies from the United States or elsewhere promoting or soliciting emigration from their areas. On several occasions agents had been arrested and forced to leave the country.

27. The letters referred to by de Pardonnet were signed by M. A. Campdoras and Louis Laurent. They claimed that he was sending numerous indigent Frenchmen to Topeka with the promise that they would be provided for by the French people of Kansas. We do not know how many came or what became of them. De Pardonnet does not mention Dr. Campdoras in his letters but says that Laurent’s actions were prompted by personal hatred for him.
George de Pardonnet and several of his friends wrote Governor Osborn asking him to reconsider the revocation of the commission. S. Lang, a French businessman of Leavenworth, wrote a lengthy letter to the governor on November 12, 1874. He praised the work of M. de Pardonnet and lamented the fact that so much zeal and arduous labor in behalf of the state of Kansas should have been so poorly rewarded. He named a number of prominent men, including the Hon. Mr. Stover, J. W. Simcock, Dr. A. J. Beach and Judge Huffaker, who stood ready to vouch for de Pardonnet. The entire French population of Leavenworth, Mr. Lang wrote, backed him in his support of the former agent.

There is nothing in the governor’s correspondence to indicate that any of these letters were ever answered. On May 30, 1875, Dr. A. J. Beach, of Council Grove, wrote Governor Osborn asking that a statement be made as to the reason for de Pardonnet’s dismissal. The governor replied, “The action of this office was based upon the fact that there is in existence no statute authorizing such a commission. Charges of a serious character were preferred against M. de Pardonnet but for the reason above stated the commission was revoked.”

So far as we can determine, George de Pardonnet did not return to Kansas to live. There is no record of the number of immigrants he induced to come to Kansas. Several new families came to the Cottonwood valley in the early 1870’s and some of them may have been influenced by his advertising. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company has no record of the activities of M. de Pardonnet as land commissioner and immigration agent of the company nor do they believe that there was any substantial colonization of French people on their lands in Kansas. Many records of the company’s predecessor, the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway Company, were destroyed when the station and office building at Parsons burned many years ago.29

28. Sylvain Lang was born in Nantes, France, in 1837. He came to America in 1857 and lived for a year at Louisville, Ky. He went back to France and served his required time in the army there, in 1863, he came to the United States and settled in Leavenworth. He was engaged in the wine and liquor business for a number of years. He took a very active part in organizing French residents of this section into societies. In 1886 he succeeded in uniting the French societies of the United States into a national organization and served as president for three years. In recognition of his services Mr. Lang was appointed French vice-consul of Jackson county and the state of Kansas. He served in this capacity until his death April 12, 1900. Sylvain Lang was a frequent visitor in Florence. Emil Brus, also well known to members of the French colony, was appointed vice-consul to succeed Mr. Lang.—Kansas City Times, April 13, 1900.

29. This information was furnished by N. A. Phillips, secretary of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company, in a letter dated November 23, 1949.
Miss Nell Blythe Waldron, in her thesis, "Colonization in Kansas From 1861 to 1890," says that Kansas gained not more than 50 permanent settlers and that the project failed, not because the French did not want to emigrate nor because Kansas could not receive them but because the wrong man was sent as agent. Pardonnet was of the aristocracy and the French Republicans who were in Kansas resented his dealings with the humble folk to whom he undoubtedly misrepresented conditions in Kansas.

THE CAZES AND FIRMINS

Gustave Caze and his sister, Leonie, settled in Doyle township in 1875. He was then 22 years of age and his sister about three years older. He filed his intentions to become a citizen at Marion Centre on December 15, 1875, and received his final papers April 29, 1881. Shortly before the latter date Gustave Caze made a trip to France. It was rumored in Florence that he had been taken into the army but the report was untrue.

On May 8, 1884, he was married to Mme. Ernestine Ayral, the widow of Francis Ayral. The Ayrls had come to Kansas some years previously but Francis Ayral had returned to France in 1883 because of ill health and died there. Gustave Caze took his bride to France for their wedding trip. They spent two months visiting friends and relatives, returning to Florence early in August.

For several years before his marriage, Mr. Caze had been associated in business with his brother-in-law, Emile Firmin. Mrs. Firmin was a sister to Gustave and Leonie Caze.

Emile Firmin was born on October 11, 1846, in Ispagnac, department of Lozere, France. He was the son of Firmin Firmin and his wife, Marguerite Sophie Bouncil. From the age of 11 until he was 18, Emile Firmin attended the college at Mende, France, near his home. In 1870, he was graduated from the Paris law school. During the Franco-Prussian war he served as a lieutenant in General Bourbaki’s division in eastern France. After the war he returned to his native department and served for five years as notary of the town of Chanac. In France, a notary is of much greater importance than in any other country. He not only acts as witness in the signing of documents but draws up all contracts, mortgages and other deeds and conveyances where the property in question amounts to more than 150 francs. In 1875, Emile Firmin’s attention was attracted to Kansas by a pamphlet published in France, probably the one written by George de Pardonnet. Six years later, he and his wife joined their relatives near Florence.
Both Emile Firmin and Gustave Caze had considerable means and they were shrewd businessmen. They soon became important factors in the political and economic affairs of Florence and vicinity.

For many years the large tract of land east and north of the river and south of the present Highway 50S was owned by Firmin and Caze. As the town expanded, part of this tract adjoining the river was subdivided into lots. After it was incorporated into the city, it was known as Firmin & Caze's addition. They owned other land around Cedar Point and Florence and considerable land in western Kansas.

In July, 1883, Messrs. Caze, Firmin and Ayral completed arrangements for the construction of an opera house in Florence. The contract was let to J. M. Anderson of Emporia. The estimated cost of the building was between $14,000 and $15,000 and was to be completed by January, 1884. It was to stand on the southwest corner of Main and Fifth streets and to be three stories in height. The first floor was designed for a store building to be occupied by Tucker & Chandler's Dry Goods Company. The second floor front was to be used as offices. The third floor front was to be fitted up for stage dressing rooms while the balance of the building above the first floor was to constitute the main gallery of the opera house which would seat over eight hundred persons. The front of the building was to have iron columns and French plate glass for the first story and above that "modern improvements" and galvanized iron cornices. The Florence Herald for July 21, 1883, in the feature item describing the proposed opera house, stated that it was to be the finest and largest between Emporia and Denver. The editor of the paper also commended the three gentlemen who were financing the project which would give Florence a much needed meeting hall, adding that it was all to be built with Frenchmen's money.

The opera house was formally opened on January 24, 1884. For the opening night the managers secured the popular Louis Lord Dramatic Company and the play to be presented was "The Linwood Case." The Hon. J. Ware Butterfield opened the festivities with a short address in which he noted the remarkable advancement that had been made by the town of Florence. He mentioned the fact that the town was indebted to French capital and public spirit "for this substantial evidence of genuine interest in the success of histrionic pursuits."

During the next few years many different dramatic companies and musical troupes played at the Florence Opera House and it was used
by the local people for programs, balls, etc. Usually the traveling companies gave two performances and they were as a rule, well attended. In a little over a year, three different companies presented Uncle Tom’s Cabin and each played to a capacity house. The third performance, the Boston Double’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, nearly ended in tragedy.

In the third act two donkeys were brought upon the stage. One of them stumbled and knocked over one of the footlights. The lamp broke and oil ran over the floor and back under the stage. The oil ignited and, for a few moments, the fire spread rapidly. In attempting to smother the flames under the stage, one of the men broke through and narrowly escaped falling to the floor of the dry goods store below. The fire was finally put out, and although part of the audience had gone home, the play continued to the end. The lessee of the theater informed the people of Florence that in the future like accidents would be guarded against by keeping a barrel of water, buckets and blankets near the stage during every performance. At that time the city of Florence had no fire-fighting equipment, so the fire could have caused considerable damage if it had not been controlled.

On May 12, 1891, the opera house did burn down but it was at night when the place was empty. It was rebuilt in a few weeks by Firmin and Caze and the building is still in use in Florence.

Emile Firmin: Kansas Agent in France

In 1888 the congress of the United States authorized the several states to send representatives and exhibits to the industrial exhibition which was to open in Paris in May of the following year.

Later in the year Emile Firmin wrote to L. U. Humphrey, governor-elect of the state, asking that he be considered for the appointment as Kansas commissioner to the exhibition. He said that he had been not only an observer but also a student of Kansas climate, soil and products. He had given the matter his attention for the purpose of better informing the French people of the advantages of the great and growing state. He proposed to put the results of his study in the form of a printed pamphlet for these reasons:

First.—To correct some erroneous impressions among the more desirable classes of our foreign population speaking French relative to Kansas, and

Second.—To furnish such information to the business and moneyed classes of France that will induce more of them to unite their abilities and means with
ours in still further achievements in the line of commercial prosperity and social progress instead of wasting their time and means in unsuccessful efforts in the crowded portions of the East.

Mr. Firmin felt that a pamphlet in the French language would be beneficial because he recalled that it was through such a channel of information that he was first attracted to this country.

Several petitions urging the appointment of Mr. Firmin were sent to the governor. One was from Rush county where Emile Firmin was well known, another was signed by a number of businessmen of Florence and prominent men from over the state. A third petition came from the French colony at Florence and read as follows:

To the Governor and Members of the Kansas Legislature:

In pursuance of the direction embodied in the following resolutions we transmit herewith the expression of our people on a subject of much importance to the State—

Whereas, Congress by resolution and legislative appropriation, has made provision for representation of the United States at the World’s Exposition to be held in Paris, France, commencing in May next, and has invited the several states of the Union to participate therein, and

Whereas, the French people of Marion county, Kansas, constituting the largest French colony in the State, are desirous of increasing that class of immigration from their country that represents the more diversified industries as well as means sufficient to develop them in Kansas, and

Whereas, Mr. Emile Firmin, of Florence, Kansas, has for several years given special attention and study to the question of increasing the variety of our industries in direct adaptation to the climate, soil and seasons of the State, therefore be it

Resolved, That the French colony of Florence and Marion county in public meeting assembled hereby express their deep interest and confidence in the practicability and importance of Mr. Firmin’s ideas and energy in the direction indicated, and indulge the hope that our young and marvelous State will add new progress to her achievements by the inauguration of a system of immigration marked by an intelligent discrimination in favor of those who are better fitted to take their places among the industrial and commercial classes, and whose means will enable them to give greater assistance in the development of our natural resources, and be it further,

Resolved, That His Excellency, the Governor and the Honorable Senators and Representatives of our Legislature, be solicited to give this matter their favorable attention and to take such action in regard thereto as will give to Mr. Firmin’s efforts the greatest possible influence in bringing within the borders of Kansas more of the classes whose positions in life make them desirable and important factors in all the elements of social and commercial progress, be it also

Resolved, That a copy of the foregoing be presented to the Governor and to each branch of our State Legislature and that our Senators and Representatives be urged to give this enterprise their approval and active support.

Comte de Pincre de Guimicourt, President.

Ernest Ginette, Secretary.
S. Lang, then French consular agent for Jackson county, Missouri, and the state of Kansas, wrote a personal letter of recommendation to the governor. J. Ware Butterfield and J. B. Crouch of Florence spent almost the entire month of February in the legislature in Topeka working for the passage of the bill which would authorize the appointment of a Kansas agent to the French exhibition.

On March 2, 1889, the bill was signed by the governor. In brief, the duties of the Kansas commissioner were to act in conjunction with the United States commissioner general to the fair in all matters touching the interests of the state; to disseminate information about the state; to issue invitations for participation in the exhibits; to apportion the space placed at his disposal.

The legislature acted on Mr. Firmin's suggestion and provided further that the said commissioner was to prepare and have printed, in the French language, for distribution at the exposition (said printing to be done by the state printer), a pamphlet containing a condensed history of the state presenting such information as would tend to enlist the interest and secure the citizenship of the best class of enterprising and thrifty immigration.

The sum of five thousand dollars was appropriated for the project.

The law was published in the official state paper March 7, and on the same day, Governor Humphrey appointed Emile Firmin to the position. Thus, for the third time, a Frenchman from the Cottonwood valley was sent abroad by the state of Kansas for the purpose of encouraging Frenchmen to leave France and settle in Kansas. This time the Kansas agent went with the consent of the United States government, the approval of the Kansas legislature and the good wishes of a great many of the people over the state who seemed to be genuinely interested in the undertaking. On the whole the appointment of Mr. Firmin brought favorable notices from the press, although Sol Miller and one or two other editors were dubious of the measure. While the primary purpose of the law was to have Kansas represented at the exposition there is no doubt that Mr. Firmin and other French residents of the state were much more interested in the immigration angle.

31. J. Ware Butterfield was born at Andover, N. H., February 24, 1833. He attended Colby Academy, Dartmouth College and was a graduate of Dane Law School at Harvard. He practiced law at Boston, Cambridge and Memphis, Tenn., until the Civil War when he served as captain in the Twelfth New Hampshire volunteers. He came to Florence in 1878 and opened a law office. In 1891 he moved to Topeka where he practiced law and acted as correspondent for several Eastern newspapers, reporting the legislative war of 1893. He served as representative from Marion county from 1883 to 1886. Mr. Butterfield died at Topeka, June 12, 1915.—Topeka State Journal, June 12, 1915.
In addition to the pamphlet written by Emile Firmin on the entire state, material was solicited from the various French groups in which their particular section of the country would be described.

On March 30, the French-American citizens of Marion and Chase counties met at the Florence Opera House to organize a society. A second purpose was to discuss the measures necessary to attract the greatest number of French immigrants who would undoubtedly come as a result of Commissioner Firmin's efforts.

The organization of the society was made by the selection of the following officers: Count de Pingre, president; Francis Bernard, first vice-president; Joseph Lalouette, second vice-president; E. Ginette, secretary; C. F. Laloge, treasurer, and Alphonse Bichet, Gustave Caze, August Lalouette, A. Ferlet and Jules Reverend, executive committee.

It was decided to publish a special pamphlet showing the advantages of farming in the Cottonwood valley and informing the French people interested in migrating that they would find many of their own countrymen in the valley where they would be extended a cordial welcome.

The society proposed to raise $300, the amount necessary for printing at least 10,000 copies of the pamphlet. About $200 was given at the time.

At the conclusion of the meeting Mr. Firmin, in behalf of himself and his wife, extended an invitation to all those present to bring their families and be his guests at a banquet, concert and ball commencing at 7:30 that evening in the auditorium of the opera house.

There were over 60 people present in the evening. The supper was cooked and served in true Parisian style, the waiters attired in French costume. Count de Pingre presided at the table as master of ceremonies. After the dinner and speeches by several of the guests, a concert and ball followed under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Ginette. Miss Bataille and Louis Guyot added their talent to that of the Florence artists.

Among the guests were Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bartholomey and Mr. and Mrs. Brus, wealthy French people of Kansas City, Mo. These two families were friends of the Firmins, Cazes and other members of the French settlement at Florence and frequently visited in Florence.

Emile Firmin, his wife and son, arrived in Paris on April 28 where he began his work immediately. From time to time various phases
of his activities were reported in the newspapers of the state. He wrote letters to the governor, and Kansas people who visited the exposition brought back favorable impressions of what he was doing.

The Firmins stayed in Paris a year. While there, the little boy died and Mrs. Firmin was seriously ill for some weeks. On May 29, 1890, a few weeks after their return to Florence, Emile Firmin sent a detailed report of his work to Governor Humphrey. It is from this report that we learn of his accomplishments abroad.

Mr. Firmin had received his appointment too late to make arrangements for space for any agricultural or industrial exhibits from the state. He did enter some of the state publications and some others of an industrial nature. The **Sixth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture** received a gold medal and the **Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics** was awarded a silver medal.

Fifty thousand copies of the Kansas brochure had been printed. Of these 44,000 had been taken to France, 5,000 were distributed in the United States and 1,000 were retained for use in connection with future correspondence with French homeseekers. The copies taken to France were placed in public libraries, clubs, hotels, public reading rooms and sent to individuals. In addition Mr. Firmin had supplemented the information in the pamphlet by articles written for publication in the French journals both in Paris and in the smaller cities of France.

Emile Firmin had corresponded with persons in charge of several of the leading geographical societies of France, Belgium and Switzerland, and the Societe de Geographie Commerciale de Paris had honored him by asking him to become a member. His relations with this society were very cordial. He was asked, upon two different occasions, to give lectures on Kansas and his name is mentioned frequently in the society proceedings for the year he was in Paris. Mr. Firmin found editors and society managements willing to publish reliable information about the development and progress of the state of Kansas and it was his intention, if possible, to continue to contribute to these newspapers and periodicals after his return home. In several instances he was able to correct some rather startling misstatements then appearing in regard to Kansas.

At the suggestion of Franklin C. Adams, secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, Mr. Firmin arranged exchanges of periodicals with ten of the leading learned societies. It is interesting to
note that several of these exchanges were continued until the time of World War I. The books taken to France for exhibit, and several others more local in character, were presented to the Library of the Societe de Geographie Commerciale de Paris.

As a result of his efforts, Mr. Firmin received some 2,000 applications for further information about Kansas. He had hoped, when he went to France, to interest people with education, skill and money so that, if they did come to the state, they could help develop the vast resources here. He believed that he had been successful.

Emile Firmin found, however, that there were two principal obstacles with which he had to contend. First, the impression that public sentiment in the United States was unfriendly to foreign immigration and that stringent laws were being enacted to restrict it, and second, the great effort and monetary inducements of the South American countries being made at this time to attract French immigration made a great many people less interested in coming to the United States.

Mr. Firmin sought to find new industries for Kansas from among those suggested by the vast and varied exhibits of the exposition. He thought that the growing of Ramie or China grass from which textiles could be manufactured would be profitable here and suggested greater encouragement of beet culture believing it to be an industry of great promise to Kansas. At the time of the exposition irrigation projects for western Kansas were important issues. At the governor’s suggestion Emile Firmin talked with several irrigation experts who were in Paris at the time and sent home considerable literature on the subject.

In concluding his report, Mr. Firmin acknowledged the uniform kindness of the French press and people toward his mission and thanked the governor for his co-operation in the undertaking.

Several days before Emile Firmin left Paris the French minister of public instruction conferred upon him the decoration of “Officer d’ Academie” for his labors in the dissemination of international knowledge of social geography and commerce. Mr. Firmin did not mention this honor in his report.

There is no doubt that Emile Firmin advertised Kansas among his countrymen. The energy and earnestness of his work won the respect and admiration of the French people. The attitude of the country toward emigration agents had changed considerably since George de Pardonnet went to France in 1871.
Le Radical, one of the leading papers of Paris, in its issue of November 22, 1889, commented upon this change in attitude and goes on to say:

We read lately in a pamphlet found at the Exposition, an appeal from a group of our countrymen living in the State of Kansas, the purpose of which is to show the advantages of that country to the farmer, the mechanic, and the capitalist of France. What an astonishing country is that Kansas. Here is a publication due to the labor of one of our countrymen who has come as a representative of that state, and shows it to us in a high and incessant state of development. Its population has increased tenfold in twenty-five years, it has doubled its railroad mileage in four years, and the pamphlet shows that from 1884 to 1888 the value of property increased from $240,000,000 to $300,000,000 and all this in the comforts of the highest civilization.

Where is this Kansas? will be asked when reading this. Exactly in the center of the United States—there where the maps of our boyhood placed the great American desert. The development of that country, in view of its former reputation is thereby more remarkable. Therefore we think it our duty to call the attention of the French people to this pamphlet and we thank our countryman from Kansas for this initiative.

Julius Van Beck, a German publicist, wrote Mr. Firmin from Vienna that he had read his excellent book and intended writing some articles on Kansas for various journals in Austria and Germany. He added that he would be very happy if he could make some friends for Mr. Firmin’s “marvelous country.”

Other journals wrote complimentary articles about the commissioner’s work at the exposition. In addition to the many letters Mr. Firmin received in France there were dozens of queries sent directly to Florence. Several of the people who wrote said they would be ready to start to this country a year or two later.

We have no way of knowing how many French families came to Kansas as a result of Mr. Firmin’s efforts but there is no indication that they came in any large numbers. Only five or six families came to the Cottonwood valley during the early 1890’s and some of them did not stay to become permanent residents. It was not surprising that Emile Firmin failed in this aspect of his mission. Due to conditions both in Europe and in the United States immigration had sharply declined before 1890 and after that date very few people from Central Europe came to Kansas.

Two weeks before Emile Firmin arrived home, two distinguished visitors came to Florence. They were Paul de Roussiers, a French author of note, and George Reveire, an artist. Sent to this country by the publishing firm of Firmin, Didot, et Cie., of Paris, they were

32. Florence Bulletin, April 25, 1890.
gathering material for a book which was to serve as a guide and instructor to French visitors to the World’s Columbian exposition to be held in Chicago in 1893.

It had not been Mr. de Rousiers’ intent to examine any of the country between Chicago and the Rocky Mountains but after reading the Kansas pamphlet and talking with Mr. Firmin he decided to make one stop in Kansas. Believing that the Kansas commissioner had preceded him, he made Florence his objective. Although they were disappointed that Mr. Firmin had not yet arrived, the two men stayed in Florence nearly a week. They visited the horse and cattle ranch of the Makin brothers, the sheep ranch of F. A. Wells, the farms down the Cottonwood, the Danish settlement in Summit township, the Mennonites at Hillsboro, and other places of interest in Marion and Chase counties. Paul de Rousiers was very favorably impressed with the vast and valuable lands in central Kansas, their comparative cheapness and the conditions that would make it possible “for a newcomer to start with a few hundred dollars, industry and economy, and in a few years gain a competency in life.” A copy of Mr. de Rousiers’ book American Life, translated by A. J. Herbertson, is in the library of the University of Kansas. Naturally, in a book of this type, names of individuals are not mentioned but he does make one comment about the French colony in Kansas which is of interest. He says:

One day I was with a Frenchman who had settled in Kansas a long time ago. After a long walk over the grounds he said to me, after proudly glancing around him, “you see, Sir, what I have done here. In the time of the Indians I began with my two arms, defending my cattle and crops against them; sometimes selling my plough-oxen to get a few measures of flour, to keep me from starving; and yet I never learned anything but my trade of cabinet making in my home in Burgundy.” I asked him if many of his neighbors began farming for the first time on their homesteads. “Why, down in that valley through which you came to get here,” he replied, “one farmer was once a waiter, another a salesman at Pygmaliens in Paris, a third a journeyman printer from New York, another is an old Norwegian sailor, who deserted, and I can point out to you an advocate, old soldiers, merchants and so on.”

The cabinetmaker of whom he was speaking was undoubtedly Francis Bernard and several of the people he mentioned are easily identified among the members of the French colony.

**Emile Firmin: Playwright**

Emile Firmin wrote a play in 1892. The theme was drawn from the vagaries of the American social and political system as seen through French spectacles. He engaged a professional theatrical
company to produce it and expected, following the initial performance in Florence, to send it on the road.

“Col. Granger,” Emile Firmin’s four-act play, was scheduled to be produced for the first time at the Florence Opera House on March 26, 1893. A distinguished Frenchman, M. Mital, on an official tour of the United States, was visiting in Florence the week before the date set for the performance. Being somewhat of a dramatic critic himself he read the play, pronounced it good, and extended his visit so that he could see it produced.

The opening night was quite a social event in Florence. The producing company did an excellent job of acting but the audience did not take kindly to Mr. Firmin’s play. As Jay E. House, then editor of the Florence Bulletin, wrote: “It treads too harshly on the corns of the American people to ever become a money-making production in its present form. People do not go to play houses to have their dearest follies and foibles laughed to scorn.”

Many years later Mr. House was writing a column entitled “On Second Thought,” for the Topeka Daily Capital. One day he made the Firmin play the theme of his column:

Contrary to the general impression E. W. Howe’s Story of a Country Town is not the first play by a Kansan to be staged and produced by a regular theatrical company. Twenty years ago there lived on a farm on the outskirts of Florence, Marion county, a Frenchman named Emile Firmin. Firmin was a man of marked ability. In France he had been a distinguished lawyer. . . . Firmin was interested in the drama and built the first and only “opera house” in Florence. By and by he wrote a play and it was produced by a traveling company doing a three nights stand in that locality. The writer witnessed the first performance of the piece and wrote the only criticism of it ever embalmed in print and take it from one who attended its untimely demise, it was a pippin. Technically it was almost, if not quite, flawless, and it had all the natural elements of a successful drama. But in writing the play Firmin had smashed every idol the American people hold dear. He took the hide off the old soldiers and the pension plan, a much more heinous offense than now, slammed the church and rasped the clergy, ridiculed our social and religious conventions, and burlesqued our political gods. Wherever a pimply spot showed on the surface of our body politic there Firmin trampled with both feet. In the originality of its conception and the cleverness and keenness of its satire the mark of genius showed clearly. But it wouldn’t do and we knew it. After the performance those of us who were his friends led the author away beseeching him to make such changes in it as would make it acceptable to American audiences. But Firmin was obdurate. He wouldn’t change a line nor a phrase. And so, the child of his fancy went into the scrap heap without reaching the dignity of a second performance.
In June, 1902, another of Mr. Firmin's plays was produced in the Opera House. This too was a satire on our social life. It was a one-act play entitled, "Marriage in Chicago." According to the Marion County News Bulletin, Florence, for June 12, 1902: "It is safe to say that Mr. Firmin has placed more marriages and divorces in the short space of eighteen minutes than the average Kansas judge could carry through in as many months." Perhaps because the scene was laid in Chicago or because the theme was not so vital this play seemed very clever and amusing. It was received much better than "Col. Granger" had been.

The Firmins moved to town in 1892. At first they lived in the upper story of a building they owned at the corner of Main and Fourth streets. Later they built a house in the Firmin & Caze addition east of the river. Mr. Firmin made a great many trips to western Kansas where he still owned land. He and Gustave Caze owned considerable land east of Florence and they devoted much of their time to improved methods of farming. They specialized in the breeding of Hereford cattle and built up quite a large herd. They had a large vineyard which yielded quantities of grapes of excellent quality each year.

In March, 1904, Messrs. Firmin and Caze announced a sale on their farm later in the spring. They offered 190 head of Hereford cattle, most of which were purebred. They also advertised their town lots for sale.

Mr. and Mrs. Firmin and Leonie Caze left Florence about the middle of May to return to France to live. Gustave Caze and his wife left later in the same month for Kansas City where their daughter, Camille, was in school. They expected to make a rather extended tour of the East and then sail for France in July. The Cazes planned, when they left Florence, to stay in France for about three years during which time Camille would finish her education and then return to Florence to live.

Neither family ever came back to the United States. From time to time friends in Florence received letters from one or the other of the families. In 1905, Emile Firmin wrote H. J. Reverend that he and Gustave Caze had joined another American in the manufacture of prepared milk for commercial purposes, the milk being reduced to a powder.

Emile Firmin died April 19, 1914, at his home at La Carenne-Colombes, near Paris.
Camille Caze married Roger Deletang who died in 1925 at the age of 39. At the time of his death he was mayor of the village of St. Georges des Boillargeau in the department of Vienne, France. Mrs. Deletang never remarried and now lives at Poitiers, Vienne. She writes occasionally to one or two people in Florence. A year or two ago she asked a friend to send her some popcorn. She remembered it from her childhood at Florence and her grandchildren had never had any.

[To Be Concluded in the May Issue]