ARTICLE OF THE MONTH
La Bénédiction du jour de l’An - Edmond-Joseph Massicotte, 1912

Mission Statement: To preserve and promote the French-American heritage in Minnesota through education and community events.
Website: www.fahfminn.org. YouTube: FAHF Minn.
A French-Canadian tradition

LA BENEDICTION DU JOUR DE L’AN

Beautiful illustration isn’t it? This drawing was made in 1912 by the French-Canadian artist Edmond-Joseph Massicotte (1875-1929). It is titled “La Bénédiction du jour de l’An,” which translates to “New Year’s Blessing.” This print is part of a famous collection by the same illustrator called “Nos Canadiens d’Autrefois.”

Since as long as I can remember, it has been my task, as the eldest child of my family, to gather my siblings in the living room on the morning of January 1st and ask my father to bless us for the new year.

My brother, sister and I would kneel in front of him and he would pronounce the Blessing to wish us good health, kindness and wisdom along with the "Au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint Esprit, Amen." My parents had this tradition with their parents, then my grandparents with theirs, and so on. My dad told me that they would also visit the other side of the family to get the paternal blessing as well.

Therefore, last New Year’s Day, thanks to the Internet video technology, I kindly asked my father to bless my family. My parents are still living in my hometown of Kiamika, Quebec, and I am now in St. Paul, Minnesota. It is a tradition that we will continue with my husband and our children and, hopefully, they will continue this with their own children.

Mr. Pierre Girard, another FAHF board member, sent me this recollection:

"My dad used to tell us kids about going to both his grandparents' homes on New Year’s Day to receive the New Year’s Blessing on the family from his grandfathers. I am sure his father also pronounced the Blessing on his own family that day too. Their whole family would kneel before their Grandpa Solomon Girard to receive his blessing. Then they would walk a few blocks away to receive the Blessing from Grandpa Louis Lamothe.
Since he had been injured in the American Civil War, he was bedridden. The entire family would then kneel around his bed as he pronounced the Blessing upon them. Because I am now the only son left in our family, I would like to pronounce a New Year's Blessing to my family and friends that the new year will be a blessing to all, that it will be prosperous, healthy and a wonderfully happy time in which you live. Dona Nobis Pacem."

I thought that this New Year’s paternal blessing tradition was very French-Canadian, but I found out that it is way more ancient than that. It is said to come from the Bible where the father figure looks over his family. Then it crossed the ocean with the pioneers to New France up to this day.¹

Do you have memories of this tradition in your own families?

A bit more about Edmond-Joseph Massicotte

Edmond-Joseph Massicotte was a renowned Quebecois artist and illustrator. He was born in a parish of Montreal in December of 1875 (Sainte-Cunégonde). Actually, the parish itself was born that same year.

Edmond-J. was the second son of Édouard and Adèle Bertrand. The Massicotte family only had three children: Édouard-Zotique, Edmond-Joseph and Marie Antoinette.

He embraced the art nouveau genre in his illustrations. He is mostly remembered for his series of 12 prints (1923) titled "Nos Canadiens d’Autrefois." Six more prints came later to complete the series of 18, about which Mrs. Courtemanche-Roche spoke so fondly in her letter. He also collaborated with his brother Édouard-Zotique who is remembered also as an archivist, squire, lawyer and more.

To view the prints series, visit the Musée national des beaux-arts website at www.mnbaq.org. It might trigger similar memories for you as well. To learn more about Mr. Massicotte, visit the Dictionary of Canadian Biography online.

By Caroline Meilleur

¹ https://dianejoly.ca/la-benediction-paternelle-de-rituel-collectif-a-pratique-familiale/
Inspiration

This first article was inspired by a letter written in 1999 and sent to one of our FAFH board members by Mrs. Madeleine Courtemanche-Roche, Quebec-born, who lived most of her life in the Twin Cities area. In her letter, she said that she wanted to present the prints that she received, as an award for a writing contest in her youth, to her fellow Société members (sort of a show and tell). Madeleine’s letter also speaks fondly of her homeland and how her attachment to Quebec grew with the years.

Mrs. Courtemanche-Roche was born on October 2, 1927, in the town of St-André-Avellin, Outaouais region, Quebec. She was the daughter of Emile Courtemanche and Eva Cyr. Her father was chef cantonnier, a chief road mender, at the time of her baptism. Later, she married Joseph Henry “Joe” Roche, son of Joseph William and Margaret Ruth Henry, on October 15, 1949, in Duhamel, Papineau, Quebec. They met while working on the Goose Bay military base in Labrador, Newfoundland. Joe was an American naval officer from Robbinsdale, Minnesota. They moved to the United States that same month to go to Patuxent River, Maryland, where Joe would work at the Naval Air Station. Together they would raise eight children and were foster parents as well. Mrs. Courtemanche-Roche passed away on July 13, 2020, in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota.

By Caroline Meilleur
You have just learned that Mrs. Courtemanche-Roche's father, at the time of her birth, was a “chef cantonnier” (road mender). Perhaps you remember an old French song with that word cantonnier in it? Moi, oui [me too]! Here’s a YouTube link from La Soirée Canadienne, a TV show recorded back in 1976 in the town of l’Ancienne-Lorette, Qc: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSwa9HWnZCQ.

This Quebecois arrangement made by the French-Canadian Catholic priest Charles-Emile Gadbois (1906-1981) was borrowed from the French song “Sur la route de Louviers.” Father Gadbois is known for the creation of the music publishing company: La Bonne Chanson to promote French songs and French-Canadian songs.

By Caroline Meilleur

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Un peu de généalogie... Here’s the Courtemanche paternal line of Mrs. Courtemanche-Roche. We took the line back to this New France pioneer, Antoine Courtemanche dit Jolicoeur, who was born in the parish of Bannes (Dissay-sous-Courcillon, Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) in 1640. He was first mentioned in New France in 1659 as en “engagé” towards Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière (contract Demontreau, La Rochelle). He boarded the ship the Saint-André on July 2, 1659, with Jeanne Mance and Marguerite Bourgeois.7-8

Courtemanche ancestral line
of
Madeleine Courtemanche-Roche

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| 1st | Antoine Courtemanche dit Jolicoeur | April 26, 1633
Ville-Marie* (Notre-Dame), New France | Elizabeth Achin
(Abraham & Marie Descallognes) |
| 2nd | Antoine Courtemanche | November 8, 1688
Montréal (Notre-Dame), New France | Marguerite Vaudry
(Jacques & Jeanne Vigneau) |
| 3rd | Pierre Courtemanche | November 8, 1733
Longue-Pointe, Montréal, New France | Marie Fissiau dit La Ramée
(Jacques & Anne Monet) |
| 4th | Pierre Courtemanche | November 25, 1776
Varennes, Province of Quebec | Madeleine Girard
(Joseph & Josette Casavant) |
| 5th | Joseph Courtemanche | February 1st, 1814
L’Assomption, Lower-Canada | Marie Marguerite Houle
(Thomas & Marie Josephite Landry) |
| 6th | Jean Baptiste Courtemanche | November 22, 1858
St-André-Avellin, East-Canada | Domitille Lacasse
(Joseph & Angélique Desjardins) |
| 7th | Pierre Courtemanche | August 13, 1888
St-André-Avellin, Quebec | Léontine Bolduc
(Pierre & Philippe Roy) |
| 8th | Emile Courtemanche | July 15, 1924
St-André-Avellin, Quebec | Eva Cyr
(Alias & Rebecca Legris) |
| 9th | Madeleine Courtemanche | October 15, 1949
Duhamel, Quebec | Joseph Henry Roche
(Joseph & Margaret Ruth Henry) |

© C. Meilleur Genealogy - February 2021

* Montréal was founded in 1642.


La Tourtière (meat pie)
The famous "tourtière"! You might have eaten it, seen it or at least heard of it. It is probably the most well-known Canadian dish!

Just for the fun of it, I posted on my Facebook wall a question to my French-speaking friends asking what a “tourtière” was to them. Like I presumed, everyone who replied had a similar post, but different ingredients, sizes and ways of doing it. It almost created an emotional debate! Honestly, there must be as many recipes as there are families.

In my own family, for example, my mother calls a regular tourtière (pie with ground meat): a meat pie. For her and all her folks from the Saguenay/Lac-St-Jean and Quebec City regions, a tourtière is also a meat pie but with meat cubes and a much bigger format. It will look similar to this photo below (see next page for recipe). Attention, it's a deep dish!

On my father’s side, those who are from the Laurentians, and to most people, a tourtière is a meat pie - in a regular pie-size dish.

There is the Acadian tourtière that adds skin-on, bone-in chicken breast in the filling. These traditional meals are usually made and eaten during Christmas time (at the “réveillon” on Christmas eve), during the holidays and throughout the winter season. Ingredients are similar but, like I said, every family has their own recipe. So even if I wanted to give you THE recipe, there are so many!

All tourtières are meat filled pies and common ingredients are pork, beef, veal, chicken, onions, cloves, potatoes and spices. There is also the game version with meat from deer, moose, caribou, partridge, rabbit, bear, etc. This version was the one our ancestors made. For vegetarian, there are recipes with meat-like ingredients and that tastes very good also.

By Caroline Meilleur
One thing for sure is that the tourtière is an "incontournable" dish to try.

Here’s the Saguenay meat pie recipe from my mother (Lou). We usually eat it with ketchup (regular or house-made) and with "salade aux câailles" which translates to a curdled milk salad (fresh and crisp green salad, chopped green onions, curdled milk, salt and pepper). SO YUMMY! This salad is typically from Saguenay also.

**Tourtière du Saguenay**  
Recipe courtesy of Lou Gilbert

**Ingredients**

- 5 lbs. of potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1.5 lbs. of pork filet, cut into small cubes
- 3 chicken breasts (skinless and boneless), cut into small cubes
- 1.5 lbs. of stewing beef, cut into small cubes
- 2 medium onions finely chopped
- 200g of pork dripping (roast pork fat)
- Salt and pepper
- Water
- 2 large rolled-out short crust pastry

**Preparation**

1. Preheat the oven to 400˚F.
2. In a large bowl, combine the meat, onions, potatoes and pork dripping. Season with salt and pepper. Mix well.
3. Take a roasting pan and line the bottom of the pan and sides with one of the pie crusts.
4. Add the meat, onions and potatoes and fill the pie with water to cover the mixture.
5. Add the second pie crust on top and close the sides together.
6. Cook uncovered at 400˚F for 1/2 hour, then put the cover on and reduce the heat to 300˚F and cook for about 5 to 6 hours.

I went through the archives of the Chez Nous/Nouvelles Villes Jumelles newsletters, published between 1980 and 1995 and I found some recipes for the traditional meat pie.

**Tourtière (meat pie)**  
(Chez Nous newsletter of La Société Canadienne Française No. 1, Vol. 1 - April 1980 - p. 3.)
The recipe above is taken from the Nouvelles Villes Jumelles newsletter of La Société Canadienne Française du Minnesota - November 1986 - page 4.

This third one is from the Chez Nous newsletter of La Société Canadienne Française - February/March 1987 - Vol. 8 No. 4 - page 6.

Bon appétit!