University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society | Nebraska State Historical Society

1-1-1885

Notes Relating to Fontenelle Family

A. L. Thompson

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans

Part of the History Commons

Thompson, A. L., "Notes Relating to Fontenelle Family" (1885). *Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society.* Paper 44.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans/44

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska State Historical Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

INTERESTING HISTORICAL NOTES PERTAINING TO THE FONTENELLE FAMILY, AND EARLY DAYS OF NEBRASKA.

While at New Orleans during the Exposition of 1884–5, a very intelligent, well preserved, elderly lady called at my office, Nebraska Headquarters, introducing herself as Mrs. Thompson, then of Chicago, and cousin of Henry Fontenelle. She was an exceedingly fluent and interesting conversationist. She entered into details as to the history of the old French Fontenelle families. Before she left my office, I begged her on returning to her home, and at leisure, to furnish me in writing what information she had given me verbally during the to me pleasant hour of her visit. In due time I received the following:

CHICAGO, ILL., March 12, 1885.

Gov. Robt. W. Furnas, New Orleans, La.:

DEAR SIR—My daughter and self reached home safely. I regret we could not have remained longer in New Orleans. We enjoyed very much your pleasant company at Nebraska Headquarters. The souvenirs you were kind enough to give us will ever be cherished as pleasant remembrances of our visit to the Exposition.

In compliance with the promise made you I herewith hand you a rough sketch of mother's and uncle's lives, as narrated to you when at your office.

The records of the old St. Louis cathedral at New Orleans shows registered the baptism of Lucien Francois and Amelia Fontenelle, 1803. They were the children of Francois and Marieonise Fontenelle, then residing at a point below New Orleans, called Burat, a settlement near Pointe a la Hoche. They were originally from Marseilles, France, and of royal descent. A few years after the date given, one of those terrible freshet hurricanes visited the section where this family resided, swept away and drowned the whole family, destroying all traces of the plantation. At that time Lucien and Amelia were at New Orleans in care of an aunt, Madame Merlier, for the purpose of being educated, and were thus saved. About the year 1816, Lucien was a clerk in a New Orleans banking house. His aunt, who had charge of the children, was a very haughty, austere, cruel woman. One day, for some cause, she struck Lucien. This so wounded him

that the same night he packed up a small bundle of clothing and confiding his secret to the old colored nurse, Sophie, left for the wild West. Time rolled on and Lucien was not heard from. In the meantime his sister Amelia married Henry Lockett, an eminent young lawyer of New Orleans, nephew of Judge Henry Carleton, for many years judge of the supreme court of New Orleans. Fortune favored him with wealth and a family of daughters, who in turn married and settled in New Orleans.

Twenty years after Lucien left home, the servant of Mrs. Lockett informed her one day that a gentleman in the parlor desired to see her. On entering the gentleman clasped her in his arms and called her sister. She freed herself as soon as possible, denying any relationship, as her brother, she claimed, was a white man, and this one, to all appearance, was an Indian. He insisted he was Lucien Fontenelle, but the sister would not believe him. He then asked if the old servant Sophie was alive. She was, and was called in to identify him. She failed to recognize him from appearances, but stated if it was really Lucien, a flesh mark on his right foot would identify him. He pulled off his boot and stocking, when Sophie, finding the mark, he was thus identified.

He was a thorough Indian, to all appearances. He told his sister when he left home he went to St. Louis, there joined the American Fur Company, going all over the great North-west as far as Hudson bay, crossing the Rocky mountains and through what is now Oregon, Washington, and other western states and territories. He could speak ten or fifteen different dialects. He was intimate with the Chouteau family at St. Louis, and at one time expected to marry in that family. He was well supplied with means, and was lavish with his money. He said his home was where Bellevue, Nebraska, now is, and that he had married an Indian woman of the Omaha tribe, at which his sister became very indignant. He remained in New Orleans some six weeks when he left for his home among the Indians, promising to return some time again. On his way he was taken sick and died, as near as we could learn at a point which is now Alton, Ill. Where he was buried was never known. A few months after he left New Orleans a Catholic priest calling himself Father De Smet called on Mrs. Lockett, in New Orleans, and stated he had been with Lucien in his last moments, administering to him, and that his last request was that

he should see his sister and ask her to take his only daughter, and his fortune was at her command to care for and educate her, and the priest to educate the other children, three sons.

At that time Mrs. Lockett was wealthy and moving in most aristocratic society, and had no need of her brother's money. She told Father De Smet she could not take the daughter, and he was welcome to the money for the use of the children. She then thought no further of the matter.

In 1870 or 1871 a notice appeared in a St. Louis paper asking for heirs to some property in Bellevue, Nebraska. Remembering Lucien had resided there, inquiries were made as to what had become of his children. After corresponding with several persons it was learned from Father De Smet that he had performed a marriage ceremony between Lucien and the Indian woman, and that there were three sons and one daughter, whom he had baptized in the Catholic faith. Logan, one of the boys, had been killed in battle, and the others, he thought, resided in Nebraska. After searching for the property and records of grants Lucien had mentioned when in New Orleans visiting his sister, nothing was found further than that a grant had been promised, but not consummated.

In 1874 there was noticed in Chicago papers the arrival of a party of Indians from Washington in charge of Agent Gillingham and Henry Fontenelle, interpreter. A daughter of Mrs. Lockett, residing in Chicago, called at the St. James hotel where the party was stopping expecting to find some of the old Fontenelle family, perhaps a grandson of Lucien. She was joyfully surprised to find the son of her long lost uncle, after a lapse of thirty-eight years. Since then they have corresponded regularly.

Amelia Fontenelle died at Tallahassee, Florida, some two years since, at the ripe age of 81, still the same aristocratic French woman. While her fortune fled with the late rebellion she never accustomed herself to privations. She was connected to Hon. Pierre Soule, at one time member of congress. Also to Jules Caire, a prominent gentleman of New Orleans, as well as Dr. Armand Merlier, a celebrated surgeon of New Orleans, her first cousin. There are but two daughters remaining of the once large family of eleven children born to Amelia Fontenelle and Henry Lockett, one in New Orleans, the other in Chicago.

There are now living in Havre, France, two granddaughters of Madame Merlier, and second cousins to Henry Fontenelle. Their mother died some years ago. They have splendid residences in Havre, and are of the nobility.

Very truly your friend,
MRS. A. L. THOMPSON.