



De Laporte à St-Georges



Special Edition

Blessed Frère André (1845-1937) *“The Apostle of Saint Joseph,”* *A Laporte Descendant*

By: Marie-Thérèse Falslev



On the track for sainthood

Alfred Bessette, more commonly known as Frère André, was born on 9 August 1845 at Saint-Gregoire parish, Iberville, Québec to Isaac Bessette and Clothilde Foisy¹. Very little after that point in his life was ordinary, by all accounts. Because of his extraordinary life of simple humility, inspirational faith, and unwavering service to God, man, and church, he has been the impetus of great accomplishments, not the least of which is the construction of the Oratory of Saint Joseph on Mont-Royal in the city of Montréal. The 361 foot-high,² breathtaking structure dominates the southwest side of the mountain and commands the visit of hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. Many apparent miracles of healing have been attributed to Frère André's intercession with God and to the monument itself. For these reasons, this unimposing-appearing man, who was not tall in stature² during his life, became a giant in the Roman Catholic Church when on May 23, 1982, Pope Paul IV beatified Brother André³, a step toward declaring him a saint at some future point.

(cont. page 3)



Inside this special edition

Blessed Frère André
Message from the President
Blessed Frère André
Pedigree of Frère André

Page 1
Page 2
Page 3 – 7
Page 8

Message from the President



Dear members,

This newsletter dedicated mainly to Brother André, his life and his relationship with the family is the work of Mary Falslev from Benson, Utah,

land of the Mormons and leaders in genealogy. Mary, whom many of you have met at our various reunions, is very fond of genealogy and as a volunteer has privileged access to the great Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

The research required to produce this article was extensive and time-consuming and the Association is very grateful for her contribution to our archives.

As the article covers all of 8 pages, we have decided to make it a « special edition » bulletin and offer it as a gift to all participants in the 2006 Reunion and to all members in good standing. Afterwards it will join our collection of documents for sale.

Good reading ! Please give your comments at the Association at 514-344-4487 or by e-mail to myself (see below) or directly to Mary whose e-mail address is quedau@aol.com, « quedau » being short for « Quebec Daughter ».

We hope to have to distribute many copies of this bulletin at the reunion where we will be expecting you in large numbers.

I look forward to meeting you again or to become acquainted with you if you are new to the Association.

Baxter Laporte
baxter@total.net

World Association of Laporte's & St-Georges

***The President's Office
Mr Baxter Laporte
4870, Cote-des-Neiges, apt. 1510
Montreal, Canada H3V 1H3***

(514) 344-4487

Board of directors 2005 – 2006

- President: **Baxter Laporte**, Montreal and Sun City, Arizona
baxter@total.net
- Vice-president: **Ghislaine L'abbé**, Ste-Marceline, Qc
mlaporte@sympatico.ca
- Sylvain Laporte**, St-Donat, Qc
laportes@citenet.net
- Treasurer: **Madeleine Laporte**, Montreal, QC
madeleinelaporte@yahoo.ca
- Secretary: **Marcel Laporte**, Ste-Marcelline, QC
mlaporte@sympatico.ca
- Administrator: **Tom Laporte**, Winnipeg, MN
tlaporte@mts.net

Collaborator:

- **Jean Laporte**, Orleans, ON
jllaporte@sympatico.ca

DE LAPORTE À ST-GEORGES

- Conception: Baxter D. Laporte
Editing: Baxter D. Laporte & collaborators
Translation: Baxter D. Laporte
Circulation: 100 copies
Price: Free for members

Blessed Frère André, cont...**A childhood of trial and piety**

A Laporte descendant through his paternal great-grandmother, who was the daughter of Agathe Laporte (See pedigree at the end of this article), Alfred Bessette was born the sixth in a family of ten children,^{3,4} although one source claims it was twelve.¹ He was blessed to have three years as the baby of the family before any more children were born.² His father Isaac Bessette took work day to day wherever he could find it, sometimes being away for extended periods in the logging industry.^{3,4}

Because Alfred was sickly most of his childhood, and perhaps because resources were quite strained in a working class family of that size, Alfred was never as big as other children his age. Due to his fragile health, he was closely watched by his mother, and he suffered the teasing of other children outside the family for being a "mamma's boy."^{3,4} Neither did his small size and frail health lead him to draw status from his peers for any athletic ability. He was not noted for being at the top of his class in academic standing either. Perhaps for these reasons and others, he found solace in quiet meditation and prayer. His sister reports that when they went looking for him, they often found him at church in prayer.²

When he was only six years old, his father was killed in Farnham by a falling tree.^{2,3,4} Alfred's widowed mother struggled for a time, four years, to be exact,^{3,4} managing on her own, but she fell ill with tuberculosis. At this point, she found placement for all of her children with relatives, except for her little Alfred. Together, she and Alfred went to live with her sister, the wife of Timothée Nadeau, in Saint-Césaire. Eventually, however, in 1857, Alfred's mother succumbed to the disease, and when Alfred was just twelve, he and his siblings were left orphans.^{2,3,4}



Alfred remained with his aunt and uncle whom he loved and respected, as letters to them in later years indicate.^{3,4} Perhaps his gratitude and love for them as foster parents helped to form Alfred's love and devotion to another foster parent, Joseph of the Holy Family. Alfred's uncle was a healthy and vigorous man, and try as he might, Alfred could not match this man's strength and physical prowess. Alfred was probably very humbled by his own comparative lack of strength, juxtaposed to such a robust family leader. Living in the shadow of a man so successful in providing for his family must have been quite a contrast to the boy after years of attachment to his mother, with a usually absent father. No doubt, his desire to prove worthy of his fortunate placement in this home where he had come to feel comfortable and where he had memories of his mother, brought him to his knees often. He took to providing penance for his inadequacies by sleeping on the floor or wearing a heavy chain or a leather strap with sharp barbs around his torso,^{3,4} acts which did not aid in building up his strength for the demands of his work but did serve to bring ridicule from his cousins.

From all accounts of his life, Alfred never responded to life's events in any way but to become more humbled, more prayerful, and more devoted to God.

Finding his niche

Alfred's education apparently ended about the time his mother fell ill. As Alfred approached manhood, he was hired out by the day to work here and there in order to contribute to his care and keep in his aunt and uncle's home. In most of these placements, he proved less than able, due to his small stature and weak constitution, to give a pay-worthy day of hard physical labor in the crops or in clearing land. For a time, he was apprenticed to a baker, then a shoemaker,⁴ but Alfred's hands never healed from the sores that this work caused. Next, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith in Farnham,⁴ but this proved to require more muscle than his small frame could deliver. His uncle's attempt to make Alfred into the same physically strong man he himself was, no doubt furthered Alfred's humble view of himself and served to continue his private acts of self-punishment. It seems a tragedy to those who study his life that his poor health did not lend itself to regular school attendance. If he could have excelled in school at an early age, some benevolent teacher might have nurtured his entry into some more cerebral profession.

When he reached the age of majority, he took a courageous step, perhaps influenced by an uncle who went to California in search of gold; in 1853, Alfred emigrated to the United States to find work in the factories of New England.² He even worked in farming there when work could not be found in the cities of Moosup, Hartford, and Phoenix.⁴ After a few years of failing to find financial success in the U.S., Alfred was bothered by thoughts of death.

One day while working in a farmer's field, he was too weak and tired to go on. He knelt in prayer and brought his discouragement to Saint Joseph, asking if he might die there. As a result, he was given a vision of a great stone building, which he knew would have some presence in his future.⁴

No accounts of his life give any indication that Alfred planned marriage with any young woman. In fact, accounts^{2,3,4} tell of his feeling of estrangement from his peers because he found their social interaction to be more unruly than he was comfortable with. At such times, he looked for inspiration from his dead mother, which he claimed she gave him through the natural world around him, once "speaking" to him in the babbling of a brook.⁴

Alfred returned to Saint-Césaire where he had a friend in a priest named Monsignor André Provençal. This priest told Alfred about the Order of the Holy Cross,⁴ and the young man began to entertain hopes of a vocation in the priesthood. He spent more and more time in prayer in the parish church. Finally, there seemed to be hope for his future.

However, Alfred's application to the priesthood was met with rejection. After all, his education fell far below that of other such applicants who had what was called a "classic" education at the time, full of the humanities, foreign language, Latin, history, music, and higher mathematics. Furthermore, successful applicants usually attended the schools that were operated by the order that the student hoped to enter; so they were known to the order from an early age, and more often than not, had come from homes of means where their fathers had habitually made substantial contributions to the church and its causes. Alfred was, for all practical purposes, illiterate. In addition, there was the issue of his frail health.

Alfred was left to deal with yet another disappointment.

Yet, he did not give up. He continued to pray to Saint Joseph. Monsignor Provençal appealed to the bishop, and the answer came back that he would be accepted into the order, not as a priest, but as a brother, a role whereby a man makes a lifetime commitment to live in all respects as a priest, but instead of serving a parish as a pastor, saying mass, performing baptisms, weddings, presiding at funerals, he takes on the role as a domestic.

Our humble Laporte cousin, Alfred Bessette, entered the novitiate in 1870 in the small Montréal congregation of the Holy Cross, an order that operated the Collège Notre Dame. He was assigned as a doorman and porter, an assignment he fulfilled with pride and devotion until he was an old man. Alfred Bessette took the name of Frère André after his beloved mentor, the pastor of Saint-Césaire.

A life of humble example

Every biographer describes the life of our cousin Frère André as simple, yet exquisite in its peaceful and humble qualities. He was given a small cell, a room very near the door of the residence of the college's teachers. This room contained a narrow cot, a small chest of drawers, and an even smaller desk. It was his job to answer the door, carry luggage, greet guests who came to call on the priests and other brothers, keep the entry hall floor polished, and manage the gardens immediately outside this building's entrance.⁴

What joy Frère André must have felt, what gratitude to Saint Joseph for interceding for him so that he finally found a place where his services would be of value! How fortunate to be among peers who also spent much time in prayer. How glad he must have been to be under the same roof where Mass was said daily and where he could partake of Communion each morning, more often, sometimes.

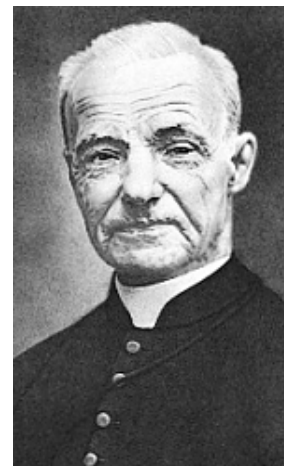
Yet, even when attending Mass, he knelt at the back so that he might hear the doorbell and rush to answer it before it might disturb the others.³

Yet, his role called for sacrifice, all of which he was never known to complain about. Since the door must have an attendant at all times, he rarely was able to eat his meals with his fellow brothers and priests. He had to wait until someone was finished with his meal and could take his place while he went to eat alone.⁴ He was often called out of his bed in the night to answer the door. He was expected to be available at any hour of the day to take care of any matter, to send for a doctor, to greet a parent looking for an errant student, to deal with an intruder who did not respect the sanctity of the mission of the congregation. His poor health continued, yet he never asked to be free of his duties to recover from his illnesses. Furthermore, it took some degree of humility for this illiterate man to live among a house full of academicians whose knowledge was held in high regard by students and their parents alike..

Over the years, he came to know the parents of all the students who attended there, as they all had occasion from time to time, to call on the teachers of their sons. He was known to offer them simple comfort⁴ for their concerns as they waited to speak to one or other of Frère André's "superiors." He was the linen keeper and the window washer. He was expected to be at his brothers' bidding day or night, to run errands to the postman, to pick up items for the cook, to hold horses pulling carriages, which awaited someone inside. He even volunteered a bit of mending for this brother or that, to sew a button, to polish shoes and place them outside a brother's door. In every respect, he was a servant.³ Yet, he had never been happier.

A great work from a lowly source

Over the years, Frère André's devotion to Saint Joseph grew. He felt inspired to produce some outward act as a symbol of the awe and respect that was due this great man of the scriptures. Frère André's ideas began in the small scale. Mont Réal, across from the college, was at that time, undeveloped land, covered by trees and brush. A portion of that mountain was owned by his congregation. Frère André asked only to be allowed to set up a small monument to his patron saint, a path with a sort of grotto where a statue could be placed. As a result of his consistent, gentle persuasion, he was finally given permission to raise funds to carry out his dream.

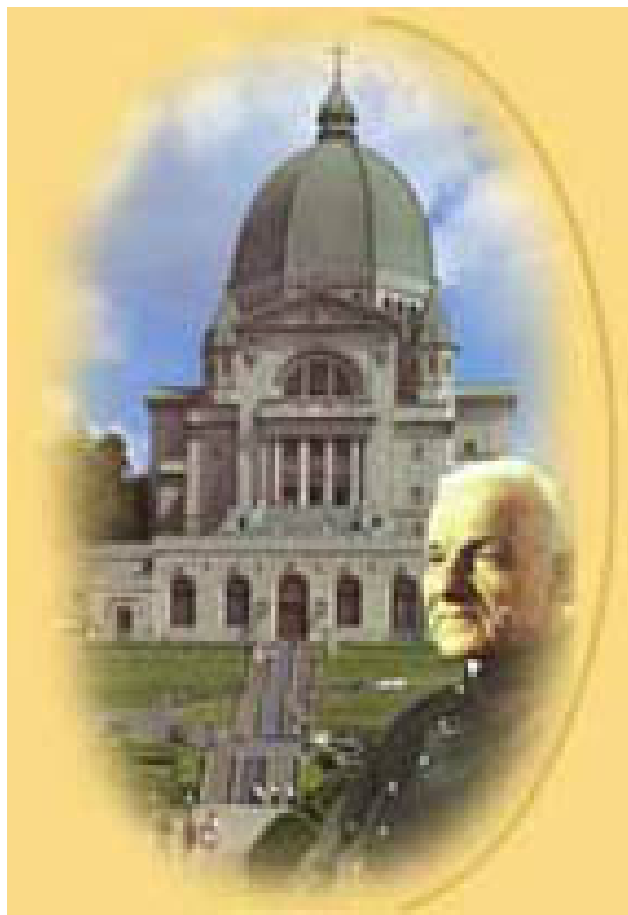


The monument to Saint Joseph began with that path and a statue in 1904.² Frère André led students and parents of students there in his spare time. He went there to pray. Many who joined him found that their prayers were answered. So they gave a small contribution. Contributions eventually purchased the construction of a small chapel in 1908.³

Yet, it wasn't only the monument to Saint Joseph that reflects the religious faith of this simple man. He would often stop in at the hospital for a moment when he would be running errands. Often a gentle touch given to a patient would bring that patient immediate relief from his pains. Some claimed that they were completely healed. A student suffering from a fever for several days in the school infirmary claimed to be healed by the mere request from Frère André that he should get up.³ His reputation grew. People who had heard of his healing power would sometimes come to him, find him doing some menial task, and reportedly be cured by Frère André's prayer without ceasing his labors. With these reported "miracles" came more contributions to his monument to Saint Joseph.

He often received reprimands for his absence from his duties while extending his errand time or for being delayed momentarily by prayer when the doorbell rang. He took these reprimands without defense of any kind, simply bowing his head and vowing to improve his performance. Frère André's domestic duties continued to be his primary responsibility even after the basilica to Saint-Joseph was begun in 1924.³ This demonstrates the humility of the man who had become more well-known than his more highly placed superiors in the order.

In his old age, when his ability to carry out his domestic duties would have been severely curtailed anyway, Frère André was assigned to an office in the basilica where he received visitors and continued to influence contributions by visitors. His reputation for miracle healings grew as the years continued. This writer remembers hearing stories by parochial school teachers who claimed that the sick who, on their knees, climbed the two hundred or so steps in front of the basilica were miraculously healed. Frère André was often followed in the streets by those seeking a cure.⁴ Yet, in spite of growing fame, Frère André continued to be known for his quiet, unassuming manner and humility. On January 6, 1937, almost 30 years prior to the completion of the interior of the Oratory to Saint Joseph, Frère André died at the age of almost 97.



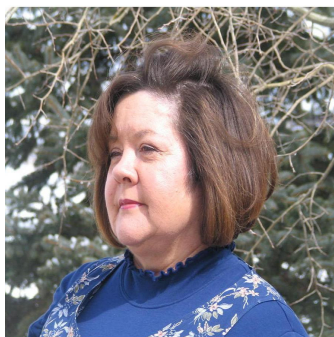
His work remains a testament to faith

On September 11, 2002, one year after the horrific events at the Trade Towers and the Pentagon in the United States, this writer sat in a concert at the Oratory of Saint Joseph where those events were commemorated. Some of the finest musicians, speakers, and choirs gathered there to share their talents in a far less humble way than did our cousin Frère André. At that time, I had no idea that the magnificent, towering structure that I was sitting in was the result of the humble life of my distant Laporte cousin. Discovering this some three-and-a-half years later makes that experience permanently memorable.

Christians of all denominations and atheists alike can find inspiration in the life of Alfred Bessette, the great-grandson of Agathe Laporte. He was a man who overcame weakness, ridicule, social isolation, lack of education, and loss of family by turning his failures and tragedies into personal, often private triumphs. He found a way to “bloom where he was planted.” He managed to find solace from his faith instead of from the acclaim of peers. He dealt with criticism without defense or excuse. He found joy in serving others in the most humble, often humiliating of tasks. He turned all of his suffering into an offering to God.

Even if we find his youthful behaviors somewhat bizarre, even if some of his responses to life's challenges would not fit the modern definition of emotionally “healthy,” even if we cannot accept as fact the reports of his miraculous cures, we can find in this man an example of an enormous fountain of inner strength to cope with the inequities of life and circumstance. When we look at the gigantic money-generating machine his monument to Saint Joseph has become, we can remember the simple, humble beginning it had. We can continue to hope that the experiences people have there are often sincere and deeply spiritual, that the contributions received at that magnificent structure still accomplish a great deal of good in the world. When we find ourselves caught up in a tendency toward self-absorption, we can take from the life of our cousin an example of selfless service, a life of honest introspection, and develop in ourselves his apparent lack of guile. If we can do this, I think that the courage and sacrifice of our common pioneer ancestors, Jacques Laporte and Nicole Duchene will not have been in vain.





This text was written by : **Marie-Thérèse Falslev**

great-great granddaughter of Heloise Laporte dite Saint-Georges (Jacques→ Pierre→Nicolas→ Louis→ Joachim→ Heloise) and also cousin to Frère André via the Lussier family

Sources

1. "Un saint homme : le frère André," *Le Carrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 20 February 1948. Clipped and inserted in the Saint-Mathias parish register on page 158.
2. André Marie, Brother, M.I.C.M., "Blessed Brother André of Saint Joseph," Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Crusade of the Saint Benedict Center, <http://www.catholicism.org/br-andre.html>.
3. Boudreau, Réal, Rev., C.S.C., *Brother André, C.S.C., The Wonder Man of Mount Royal*, Saint Joseph's Oratory Press, Montréal, 1997, as translated from Bergeron, below.
4. Bergeron, Henri-Paul, C.S.C. *Le Frère André, C.S.C., l'Apôtre de Saint-Joseph*, Oratoire Saint-Joseph Press, Montréal, 1938.
5. Irinée Jetté, *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles du Quebec*, p. 651
6. *Loiselle's Marriage Index*, film # 543,785, Family History Library, Salt Lake City.
7. *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Laporte et St. Georges* (3rd edition by the Association des Laporte/St.-Georges du Monde
8. *Saint-Mathias parish register*, 1,031,914, Family History Library, Salt Lake City.

Frère André's Laporte Pedigree

Jacques Laporte and Marie Hamelin
married 7 June 1626
Noce en Perche, Belleme, Normandie, France⁵

Jacques Laporte dit Saint-Georges and Nicole Duchesne
married 3 September 1657
Saint-Ours, Richelieu, Québec, Canada⁶

Paul Laporte and Marie Lussier
married 24 February 1688
Sainte-Famille, Boucherville, Québec, Canada⁵

Paul Laporte and Marie-Catherine Savary dite Lemay
married 3 February 1718
Sainte-Famille, Boucherville, Québec, Canada⁶

Agathe Laporte and René Barrière dit Lebeau
married 13 August 1746
Saint-Joseph-de-Chambly, Québec, Canada⁷

Marie-Françoise Barrière and Joseph Bessette
married 25 October 1775
Chambly, Québec, Canada⁶

Joseph Bessette and Angélique George (no proven connection to Saint-George)
married 8 August 1803
Saint-Mathias, Montréal, Québec, Canada⁶

Isaac Bessette and Clothilde Foisy
married 27 September 1831
Saint-Mathias, Montréal, Québec, Canada^{6, 8}

Alfred Bessette also known as Frère André