

The Perfect Height of Trees: From Joliet to Marcou in Wisconsin—Article by David Joseph Marcou.

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“For me I cannot ever be at ease/With trees that grow no higher than one's knees/Or too tall trees that splinter in a freeze.../But here we have the perfect height of trees.” – From a Poem by Calvin Trillin.

(Author's Note: Trees, including family trees, vary in height. Wherever you come from, though, your family tree, like all positive natural products within and around us, should be, “the perfect height”.)

Modern history can mimic age-old history. Though evidence of Europeans exploring the region eventually named Wisconsin did not occur until the 17th century, insights continue to be gained by people of various backgrounds in the Badger State, as they were by Native Americans prior to the first Europeans setting foot on the shores of what today is Door County and beyond.

If one glances at modern aerial photos of the Yamaska River in Canada (partway between Montreal and Quebec) and the Black River at La Crosse, Wisconsin, these images suggest why French-Canadian families migrated to La Crosse's French Island in the 19th century from the Yamaska region. Sloughs, swamps, sandbars, woods, etc., abound, apt for hunting, fishing, and in key places after clearing, farming. The French-Canadians who made it to New Orleans, much farther south, to help settle that city with other French-settlers, called their area Bayou Country, and there are similarities among all three regions, though there are no alligators native to outdoor Wisconsin or Canada, as there are in the Deep South.

According to early family recollections, the paternal ancestors of the David Ambrose Marcou Jr. (wife: Rose Brunner-Muskat Marcou) Family of La Crosse, Wisconsin, were not in the very first-wave of French-Canadians on French Island led by the Goyettes and Jolivettes ca. 1850, but arrived there and stayed, beginning soon after. Their contributions have been both everyday and notable.

La Crosse-founder Nathan Myrick had arrived at Prairie Lacrosse in 1841, and established a trading post, around which houses and businesses sprang up. La Crosse is situated at the confluence of three rivers on the west -- the Mississippi, the La Crosse, and the Black. On the east side of the city are a series of bluffs -- the principal one being Granddad's Bluff.

However, many of the first French-American settlers of La Crosse lived on French Island, across the Black River on the northwest side of the city, and also in what is now Onalaska, just north of La Crosse, as well as on the east side of south La Crosse, where the old country club stands, said Ed Marcou in January 2013, then-90-years-old and an amateur historian, relative, and former administrator for the St. Louis Cardinals and Milwaukee Brewers' baseball teams.

The focal family's direct-line Marcoux-born ancestors came from Normandy, France (early spellings of the family's name include Marcoux) between 1722 and 1754, migrating to the three-rivers region between Montreal and Quebec, Canada. The earliest direct ancestors traceable for this article, including maternal sides, are Jacques Boucher (b. 1547 at Chartres, France) and his wife, Françoise Paigne Boucher (b. 1552 at Chartres).

The earliest direct-line Marcoux-born traceable ancestor was Thomas Marcoux, born ca. 1695 in Avranches, Normandy, France. He married Francoise Abraham, of Normandy, and their son Jean Marcoux was born ca. 1722 in Normandy. Jean married Marie-Madeleine Joliet-D'Anticosti Marcoux, and they had at least one child, Jean-Baptiste Marcoux, born ca. 1 Sept. 1754 in Quebec, Canada.

Marie was a granddaughter of Louis Joliet-D'Anticosti, who co-discovered the Upper Mississippi River with Father Marquette in 1673. The discovery-corps seven-man team's portage across the Wisconsin River near present-day Portage, in Columbia County, Wisconsin, is very near Juneau County, which also factors into Marcou family history. Joliet and Marquette were sent by Canadian authorities, on behalf of the French King, "to explore the *terra incognita* west of the Fox River of Green Bay", after Frenchman Jean Nicolet had landed at Green Bay in 1634. The 1673 team traveled south after they'd discovered the Upper Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien, down to the mouth of the Arkansas River, where they learned not only of fierce Indian tribes ahead, but of Spanish soldiers, too, and headed back. Later, for that expedition and other work on the King's behalf, Louis Joliet (soon adding D'Anticosti to Joliet) was given the Canadian island of Anticosti, which according to Wikipedia, was the world's largest privately-held island then.

Jean and MarieMadeleine's son Jean-Baptiste (who married Marguerite Lafond) had a son named Joseph, who married Genevieve Niquet Marcoux; the latter couple were direct-progenitors of the focal family, with Genevieve migrating to La Crosse soon after her husband's death in 1868, dying there in 1872.

An often-used male given name in the direct Marcou line of descent was Jean Baptiste (trans. John the Baptist). There was more than one Jean Baptiste Marcou living in the La Crosse area, soon after the family first arrived on La Crosse's French Island. Genevieve's migration to La Crosse coincided with that of some of her children, including Jean-Baptiste Marcoux. Genevieve Niquet Marcoux died in 1872, at 93 years of age.

Upon first-arrival, the Marcous and Marcos, two La Crosse branches, may have all spelled their names Marcoux. But at some points, many members of the general family decided their surname would be easier to spell by lopping off a letter or two. One branch became Marcou-s, another Marco-s, while a third branch retained the Marcoux spelling, though there was a bit of spelling-ambivalence with the three branches on official records then, etc. There may also have been rarer variations spelled Marcoe and Marcu.

Daniel James Marcou – third son of David A. Marcou Jr. and Rose C. Muskat Marcou -- a former officer in charge of training for the La Crosse Police Department, a Wisconsin SWAT Officer of the Year in 2005 (for talking a killer-hostage-taker into surrendering to police while Dan was visiting Oak Creek, Wisconsin), and more recently a nationally-known crime novelist and workshop presenter, took your author to visit and take photos at French Island Cemetery ca. 1994, where many early La Crosse Marcous, Marcos, and Marcouxes are buried. Matriarch Genevieve's inscribed marker is in that cemetery, too.

Dan said our Grandfather David A. Marcou Sr. (1890-1978) told him the first French-Canadian Settlers of French Island arrived in modest early numbers. Soon after, the group of Marcouxes that included our direct-line ancestors, arrived on the banks of the Black River, near where the Clinton Street Bridge in north La Crosse stands today, camped there until the first hard-freeze set in, then crossed to French Island. A bridge or two was eventually built, so crossings did not have to be made by skiff or team ferry

in warmer weather or by walking on ice, skiing on snow, or on horse in perilous frozen weather.

The name “Marcoux” derives from the old French “Marcwulf” or “Marculf”, which means “border wolf”, and many of the early Marcouxes lived in the southeast of France (a small-town is named for them), near the Italian border; and in the east of France, near the Swiss border; as well as in Normandy. The first part of the name may predate even that, and derive from Mars, the Roman god of war and agriculture, and possibly from Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor. It may also have partly sprung from the evangelist St. Mark.

Notable people bearing the name in history include the French saint, St. Marcou (ca. 500 A.D.), who cured a French King of the then-dreaded skin disease scrofula. The kings of France for centuries continued that king's tradition of processing north to a memorial in St. Marcou's honor, right after each king was crowned at Rheims. (St. Marcou's name was eventually given to an island off the Normandy Coast, fought over by the British and French in 1795.)

Jules Marcou, a 19th century Swiss-French immigrant, created the first reliable geological map of the United States and also created a world geological map, did the first scientific study of Lake Superior, taught at Zurich University and Harvard University (he is buried at Cambridge, Massachusetts), and wrote a biography of his mentor and colleague -- the noted evolutionary scientist Louis Agassiz, whom he assisted in founding the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Massachusetts.

Earlier, Captain and Lieutenant Pierre/s Marcou, a father and son not in the direct-line of the focal family, but perhaps still related, fought in the defense of Quebec during the American invasion of Canada in 1775-76. Legend has it that one of the Pierre Marcoux killed the American General Montgomery, which seems to have turned the tide of battle the Canadians won. Americans haven't militarily invaded central Canada since.

Dan Marcou said he's fairly certain, by reviewing the Marcou coat of arms, an ancestor or two fought in the Christian crusades to the Holy Land, ca. 1100 A.D., because there's a cross in a warrior's helmet on that coat, as well as lilies, symbolic of loyalty. (More recently, there was even a French communist author of note named Lily Marcou.)

Francois (or Frank) Marco -- born in 1822 and a brother of the Jean Baptiste Marcoux (Sr.) born in 1829 in the Quebec-Montreal region, who also migrated to La Crosse -- served in the Civil War in the 21st Wisconsin, and is also buried in French Island Cemetery (Town of Campbell).

Walter Marcou, David Ambrose Marcou Sr.'s brother, served in World War I. Other family members, including in members of the focal family, have served in the military, including in Afghanistan. Although Genevieve may not have been the matriarchal ancestor for all the Marcoux, Marcos, and Marcouxes of La Crosse, she was a matriarchal ancestor for the focal family, and her husband Joseph Marcoux was a direct descendant of Louis Joliet.

Walter and David's father, John Marcou (or Jean-Baptiste Marcoux Jr., as his marriage record makes clear, with inclusion of his father – JBMSr. – and mother's names), who was married to Margret Brossard Marcou (from Detroit) until her death in 1924, transferred his farm to Walter late in John's life. The farm was later sold, and then sold again, helping make up today's La Crosse Airport grounds. John lived on the farm after its initial transfer, but apparently fell from a ladder and hurt his back. Walter's wife, Myrtle Exley Marcou, then may have asked John to move, and John was staying with daughter Tillie LaFleur on Wood Street in La Crosse, when he died in 1936.

David Ambrose Marcou Jr. is your author's father and the youngest child (of five children) of David Ambrose Marcou Sr. (born on French Island on 28 Aug. 1890) and Agnes Mary Fitzgerald Marcou (born to the James and Mary Cowen-Fitzgerald farm-family in 1888 in Juneau County, where many of Agnes's Fitzgerald relatives still live). Rose Caroline Marcou, mother of their seven children, is David Marcou Jr.'s wife of more than 60 years and daughter of Roman Alex Stricker-Muskat and Ida Rose Brunner-Muskat, both born in Dane County, Wisconsin, ca. 1900, and also the parents of seven children.

Notable people with similar/same surnames are F. Scott Fitzgerald, writer; Ella Fitzgerald, singer; Barry Fitzgerald, actor; Larry Fitzgerald, football player; Lee and Claudia Cowan, journalists; Steve Stricker, golfer; Emil Brunner, Protestant theologian; Lisa Muskat, film producer; and Tamir Muskat, Israel-born musician.

David (Sr.) and Agnes Marcou owned and/or operated grocery stores and meat markets in western Wisconsin, from the 1910s to about 1970. (They wed ca. 1915.) Agnes died in 1963 and David A. Sr. died in 1978. They are buried next to each other in Holy Cross Cemetery, Trempealeau, Wisconsin, near where David Sr. spent the last few years of his life, in a trailer-home on daughter Margaret Marcou Kiedrowski Brom's property.

Roman and Ida Muskat worked on and/or owned farms in central and western Wisconsin. Ida died in 1961, and Roman in 1977. They are buried next to each other in a Sparta Cemetery, Monroe County.

David A. Marcou Jr. was born above his parents' grocery store on April 14, 1931, in Mondovi, Wisconsin. After his birth, the Marcous lived at various addresses in La Crosse, and for a short time in Reedsburg, Wisconsin, too. There is even a photo of David Sr. working in a meat market in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, because he worked and traveled throughout the state. (A military-draft registration document ca. 1941 indicates David A. Marcou Sr. was working then for Paul Vogel in Reedsburg, when David Sr. was 51 years old, but he and his family kept an apartment at 707-1/2 Rose Street in La Crosse, too.)

The La Crosse City Directories indicate the Marcou family lived in La Crosse ca. 1936, and after the Reedsburg stint, took up full residence in La Crosse again, when the Marcou parents bought a building at 732 Rose Street from Herman Hegge(sp?). By 1942 in the City Directory, that building had become the Marcous' (Market) grocery store, one of the biggest among dozens of mom and pop stores in La Crosse then. (The city's population in 1942 was slightly less than 50,000 residents, the latter being La Crosse's most-often quoted population-figure the last several decades.)

Rose C. Muskat Marcou was born on January 18, 1931, in/near Cross Plains, Dane County, Wisconsin. Rose's father and mother eventually owned their own farm, near Cataract, Monroe County, Wisconsin. In addition to regular farming, Roman Muskat was also involved most of his life in selling baby chickens and show-roosters. He drove Nash Rambler cars, and during his most productive years, is said to have traded his new Nash in each year for a new one.

For his part, David A. Marcou Sr. used to talk about visiting farms during World War II's meat-rationing period, and shooting bulls there (walking into pens and downing each bull with a single handgun shot), which he purchased and butchered for, and sold discretely to, black market customers.

Also, each Saturday during its busiest years, Marcou's Market's floor was lined on both sides of two

long aisles with boxes of groceries, to be delivered to customers via truck. Your author accompanied his paternal grandfather occasionally on deliveries, ca. 1962. It was a time when frozen pizzas were being sold in such stores for the first time.

In 1945, Rose Muskat was sent to live with the Clark family in La Crosse by her parents, who continued with the family's farm near Cataract (Little Falls Township, Monroe County). She enrolled at Aquinas High School and worked at a soda-fountain kitty-corner from Marcou's Market owned by the Kane family (whom she'd live with after the Clarks), and operated soon by the Sullivan family, whom Rose worked for during the rest of high school.

Rose and David A. Marcou Jr. both attended Aquinas High School, graduating in 1949. Rose was generally a better student than Dave, but he proved a good athlete, making the varsity baseball team as a freshman. His dad, however, made him quit the team then, to work in the family's store.

Dave and Rose married on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1950, at St. James Church in La Crosse, where they've attended more than 63 years, and where all seven of their children were baptized, took first communion, and were confirmed, a series of events not uncommon in that era. There was a snowstorm the day of their wedding, which prevented Rose's parents attending. Brother Ray Muskat gave Rose away, and other siblings also took part, including sister Zita Muskat (m. Pretasky), parent with husband Ed of eight children, including two Miss La Crosse contestants. The Marcou couple honeymooned in Chicago and Milwaukee, and their first child, your author, was born Nov. 25, 1950.

After living in an apartment above 732 Rose Street until 1954, Dave and Rose moved their young family to 1720 Prospect Street (both addresses are on La Crosse's north side), where the couple still reside. All seven Marcou children attended elementary school (grades 1-8) at St. James School on Caledonia Street. The four oldest boys would graduate Aquinas High School on the south side, and the three younger girls would graduate Logan High School on the north side, with the youngest, Mary Katherine, being valedictorian of Logan's Class of 1981, first class at that school's new campus.

David A. Marcou Jr. held many jobs, usually as a meat-cutter, before he retired ca. 2009. In 1987, he underwent open-heart, bypass surgery, and a few years later, surgery to remove a large tumor in his colon. Despite his early penchant for at least an occasional drink, his wife made sure he made it to work every day, except when he hurt his ankle in a short-stint working for the railroad. He even crossed a picket line as meat manager for Boulevard IGA Foods in La Crosse in the 1960s, telling union-leaders from Chicago that he had seven children and a wife to feed.

After working for a local garment factory in the mid-1960s, Rose found a job she worked for 30 years, as a nursing home clerk for the Bethany-Lutheran System. She was long the right-hand woman to B-L Director Florence Kahler, whose husband, Irvin, was La Crosse's fire-chief and a president of the Wisconsin Association of Fire Chiefs.

As children, the Marcou kids were expected to work whenever possible, and maintain good school-grades. Each received a modest weekly allowance for helping around the house. The boys were also paper-carriers, early. In addition, they helped at Marcou's Market, for two dollars a week plus all the the snacks they could eat, in the early and mid-1960s. The girls worked jobs away from home, too, including Mary at the Hollywood Theatre, which is now being renovated by attorney-owner Phil Addis.

As adults, the Marcou "kids" have become community-leaders. Dan and your author (David Joseph) are mentioned; Dennis is La Crosse's municipal judge; and Tom, who first served in the US Air Force

20 years, recently retired to a third career in real-estate development, after serving many years in Washington, DC with his wife as top-level civilian employees of the US Government. Diane has served 25 years as a civilian employee of the La Crosse Police Department. Lynn was a longtime team-leader for Target Stores, later attended WTC, and is now an employee of La Crosse County. Mary is the accountant for a large construction company. All the Marcou children have their own children. Though our family has had setbacks -- including the drowning of Diane's oldest son, Tony, among 11 college-age men who drowned at La Crosse from 1997-2010 -- like most families, we keep on keeping on. One thinks, all-in-all, of the perfect height of trees.

Finally, there's an iron bridge built in 1931 (my parents' birth-year), over the Yamaska River in Canada whose upper structure resembles very closely the upper structure of the bridge over the Mississippi River at Downtown La Crosse built in 2004. The two bridges suggest the spanning of families. My photo of the 2004-built bridge on its dedication day was published as the main-photo on the front-cover of a group-anthology I directed-edited in 2005, which all eight then-living governors of our state creatively contributed to. That group-anthology is titled, "Spirit of Wisconsin".

Note About Sources: In addition to journalistic media contributing data to this article, various census and marriage records; birth, baptismal, and miscellaneous certificates; obituaries; family trees (including online, which had to be counter-checked often to verify connections); libraries and archives (especially the La Crosse Public Library and Archives, the Wisconsin Historical Society, the La Crosse County and Juneau County Historical Societies, the La Crosse Catholic Diocesan Archives, and the National Library and Archives of Canada); and many professional and amateur historians, this article also relies on word-of-mouth recollections (via interviews, etc.). The early history of French Island, for instance, wasn't written down early, or if it was, those records have not become public yet, and recycled memories must be referred to in that case. Marcou family memories recounted recently also have helped, especially those of David A. Marcou Jr., Rose C. Muskat Marcou, Daniel James Marcou, Steve Kiedrowski, and 90-year-old Ed Marcou (whose memory is still sharp, a grandson of Gideon Marcou, whose records show was a brother of Jean-Baptiste Marcou).

David Joseph Marcou is oldest offspring of David Ambrose (Fitzgerald) Marcou Jr. and Rose Caroline (Brunner-Muskat) Marcou. He's been published often, including in more than 60 books edited and/or authored by him (including "Spirit of La Crosse; A Grassroots History" and his 18-volume photo-book series, "Human Character"). He graduated St. James and Aquinas Schools in La Crosse, and his first college degree was in History from UW-Madison (1973). He earned two more degrees, at the Universities of Iowa and Missouri, and has lived and worked in London, Seoul, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin. He edited the Adams-Friendship, Wisconsin newspaper in 1990, and was the longtime La Crosse correspondent for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. His works have twice been nominated for Pulitzer Prizes. Photos and books by him are housed in many archives, galleries, museums, and libraries, including in the Wisconsin Historical Society and the La Crosse Public Library and Archives (both of which he has dedicated online galleries in), various Smithsonian (SI) Archives, the British National Portrait Gallery, and the National Assembly Library of South Korea. His photos have been in many exhibitions, too, including the SI National Museum of American History's "Gift of the Artist", a 2011-2012 group-show. He also has a dedicated online gallery of more than 1,000 of his photos on the Digital Photographer Website in the UK. David's son, Matthew A. Marcou, is married to Jessica, an artist.