



LeVasseur and Carmel families

Web and social media capsule



The LeVasseur in Illinois in the 19th century (part three)

A mansion for Madame LeVasseur

Jack Klasey Looking Back Dec 9, 2023 (1)



A young Noel LeVasseur, French Canadian fur trader, as depicted by local historian Vic Johnson. Noël LeVasseur is considered to be the first permanent white settler on Kankakee County. He came to what is now Bourbonnais in 1832, and later encouraged a large number of French-Canadian immigrants to settle there. (Photo: <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/noel-levasseur>)

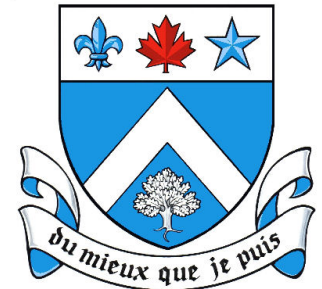
For his entire adult life, as a voyageur and fur trader, Noel LeVasseur had lived in rough shanties and log cabins.

The Quebec trip failed to produce a matrimonial candidate, but a visit closer to home in 1838 was more successful. While in Danville, Il., on business, LeVasseur met and married 20-year-old Ruth Bull, a Connecticut woman who was in that town visiting her uncle, the federal land agent.

During LeVasseur's 1837 visit to Canada, he had envisioned the home he would share with his future bride. « He brought back a clear-cut remembrance of a certain manorial mansion which embodied all that was practical and pleasing to the eye, » wrote pioneer [historian Burt Burroughs](#) in a 1932 biography of LeVasseur. « He had no

plans or specifications, no contractor's estimate. He had merely a mental picture of the mansion. It pleased him and he was resolved to have one just like it, cost what it may. »

LeVasseur contracted with an expert brick mason, Thomas Durham, to construct the house. Durham, who had settled in 1835 on land that is now



Local trivia

Ruth Bull was the second of Noel LeVasseur's three wives. Who were the other two?

Answer: The first was Watch-e-kee, the niece of a Potawatomi chief in what is now Iroquois County. Marrying a woman of a tribe with which they traded was a common practice among fur traders. Watch-e-kee and LeVasseur married in 1828, and divorced in 1836. The Bourbonnais pioneer's third wife was Eleanore Franchere of Chicago. They were wed in 1871; she survived 20 years after his death in 1879.



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the Perry Farm in Bradley, built Chicago's first brick structure (a warehouse) in 1836. LeVasseur's mansion would also be a « first » — the first brick building in what is now Kankakee County.

Burroughs noted that brick making for the LeVasseur house began in early 1838. « *They were made of top dirt burned to a deep red. The spot chosen for the mansion was most beautiful The structure faced west near where the old trail branched. It was a natural rise of ground whose natural beauty was greatly enhanced by giant trees.* »

The house was sited on what is now the south end of [Olivet Nazarene University's Burke Administration Building](#) (which was erected in the mid-1880s as Marsile Hall on what was then the [campus of St. Viator College](#)).

« *Oldtimers will recall,*” continued Burroughs, “*the columned porch, the big front door, the oriel window in the peak which stared like an all-seeing eye and the two spacious wings at the right and left of the main body of the house There was a monster chimney in the center of the house, and connected with this was the fireplace of the living room, a cavernous affair of river stone. [The andirons in the fireplace] were hammered iron capable of holding a load of logs, and the master on a cold winter's night liked nothing better than to sit before 'one beeg, beeg fire of logs' and smoke [his pipe.]* »

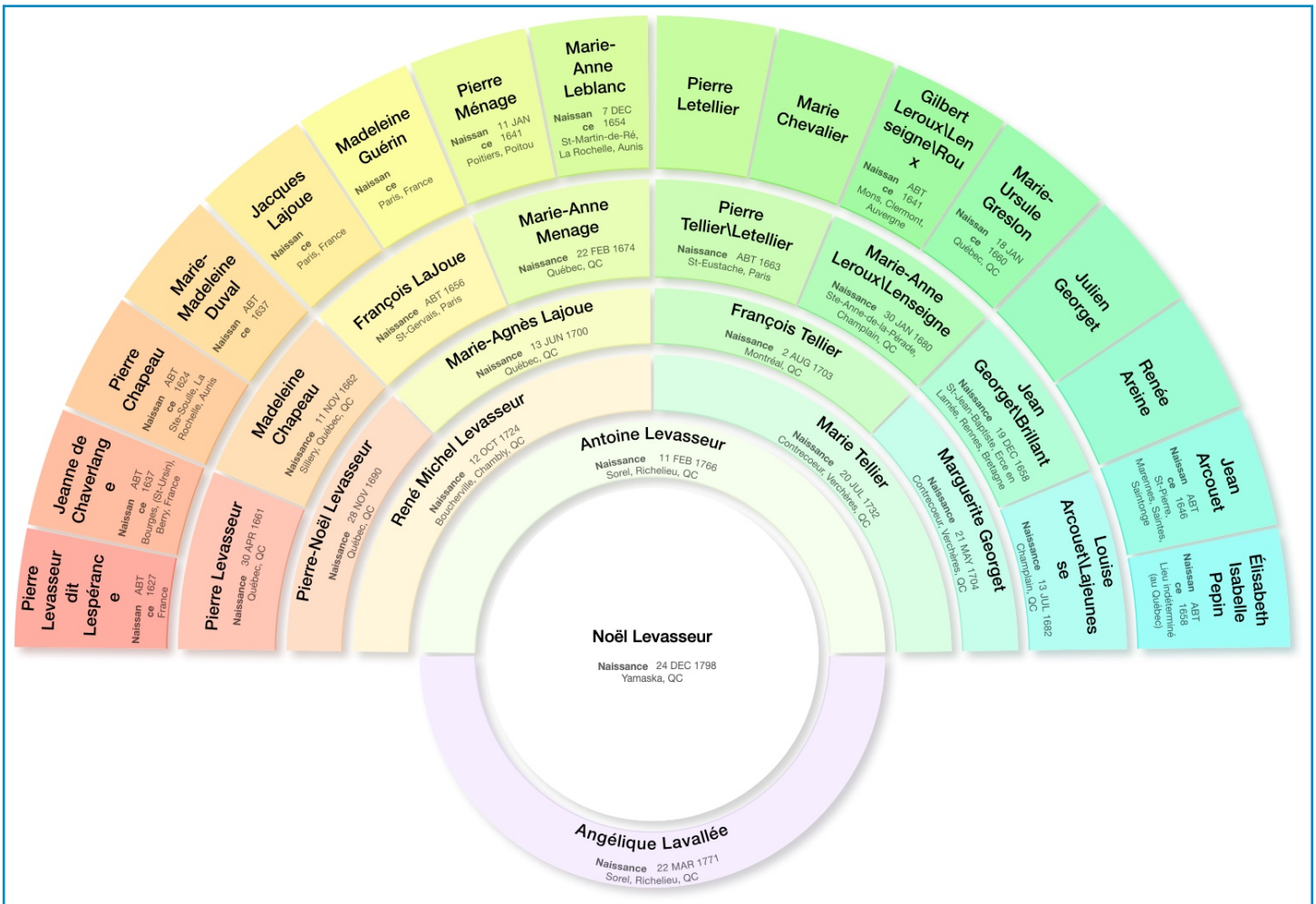
LeVasseur apparently spared no expense when erecting his new home. Burroughs observed, « *This mansion, even for 1838, when building costs were much less than what we know today, must have cost a lot of money. Even so, LeVasseur was worth a lot of money, and had he not promised his bride a mansion worthy of her?* » Indicating that luxuriousness was the keynote of the master's thoughts, the finishing lumber of the interior was of white pine without blemish. Oak and walnut, later so highly esteemed for finishing, stood in that day at the very threshold of the mansion. It wasn't everybody who could afford white pine in that day That is what made the difference.

« *The furnishings of the mansion represented the best of that day. Lady LeVasseur must have gone on a delightful spending spree in Chicago about the time the house was ready. About everything that went into the place was brand new for the very good reason that the furniture of a log cabin betrays its plebian origin when used in a mansion.* »

« *There were expensive carpets of ingrain nailed down at the edges with leather-headed tacks. There were rocking chairs, stuffed chairs and settees, [and] pictures on the walls which the critic of today would term cheap and inartistic, but which gave cheer to the living room.* » There was one

item of furniture that Ruth LeVasseur reluctantly allowed to be transferred from the log cabin to the mansion. « The gossips, » noted Burroughs, « say that LeVasseur won his first tilt with Madame when, with tears in his eyes, he pleaded with her to remove his favorite chair from the log house to a place of prominence before the fireplace in the mansion. It was a homely bit of rude pioneer furniture, but, oh, so comfortable. It was made of hickory like a camp-chair with reclining back. Its upholstery was deerskin. » Early in 1839, Noel and Ruth LeVasseur moved into the mansion. Burroughs wrote, « Dainty curtains [soon] appeared at the windows, evidence enough of woman's directing genius in the household. At night, the villagers remarked with satisfaction the candlelight threading the darkness, indicating a human habitation where, in all the ages, there had never been a home before. ».

Ruth LeVasseur was the mistress of the mansion for 21 years, during which she gave birth to eight children. She died there in 1860, at the age of 42, and is buried in Kankakee's Mound Grove Cemetery.



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Family sheet - Noël Levasseur

Noël LeVasseur was born on December 24, 1798, in Yamaska, QC. He was the fifth child of Antoine LeVasseur, born February 11, 1766, and Angélique Lavallée, born March 22, 1771. He had five brothers (Antoine LeVasseur born December 24, 1798, Michel LeVasseur born December 10, 1800, Amable LeVasseur born February 20, 1804, Pierre LeVasseur born November 13, 1806, Pierre LeVasseur born July 10, 1808) and four sisters (Angélique LeVasseur born August 15, 1793, Geneviève LeVasseur born May 4, 1795, Josephthe LeVasseur born February 11, 1797, Marie LeVasseur born January 10, 1802). Noël was 25 when his father Antoine LeVasseur died. He was 52 when his mother Angélique Lavallée died on August 5, 1851.

Noël LeVasseur had married Watseka "Watchekee" Josette around 1828 in Illinois. On February 18, 1838, he married Ruth Russell Bull in Bourbonnais, IL. On September 9, 1861, he married Éléonore Franchère in Bourbonnais, IL. He was 39 when he married Ruth Russell Bull, then 20. He was 62 when he married Éléonore Franchère. He had eight children with Ruth Russell Bull: Edward LeVasseur born October 20, 1839, Julia LeVasseur born November 7, 1841, Henriette LeVasseur born November 12, 1843, George LeVasseur born May 19, 1847, Lucy LeVasseur born around 1847, Carrie Léonie Vasseur born October 29, 1848, Fredi Frédérick L Vasseur born July 19, 1851, Guillaume Noël LeVasseur born January 16, 1857. He had three children with Watseka "Watchekee" Josette: Marian LeVasseur, Olivie LeVasseur born June 18, 1835, Archange LeVasseur born September 18, 1837.

Noël LeVasseur died in Bourbonnais, Kankakee, IL, on December 15, 1879, at the age of 80. His wife Watseka "Watchekee" Josette had died 4 years earlier, around 1875. His second wife, Ruth Russell Bull, died 19 years before him, around 1860. His last wife, Éléonore Franchère, died around 1899.