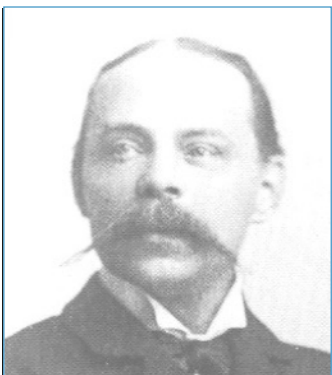




## Nazaire Levasseur, man of many talents

by: Pierre Levasseur



In a past newsletter, I wrote about Noël who has left his name in the history books of the United States and who lived a long life filled with adventures. Other Levasseurs have left their mark but none as much as Louis-Nazaire. or Nazaire for short.

Born on February 6, 1848, Nazaire, a descendant of Laurent and Marie Marchand was a well educated man. Still very young, he became interested in music, a life-long passion. This is not surprising because the family's home served for many years as a point of rendez-vous for intellectuals and artists. One of them was Antoine Dessane. pianist, composer and friend of Jacques Offenbach. Starting at age six, Nazaire learns from Dessane to play the piano, the organ and the flute. He also practices the violin.

Nazaire studies medicine at the Université Laval while pursuing classical studies at the Petit Séminaire de Québec. Unfortunately, in 1869, following a reversal of fortune of his father Zéphirin, he could not continue his medical studies. He will become reporter for the paper L'Événement, which was founded about two years earlier. Later, he will become the assistant editor, and then its chief editor until 1879.

With Antoine Dessane he participates to the founding of the Société Musicale Sainte-Cécile in 1868 and becomes assistant manager. In 1873, after the death of Dessane, he becomes manager until 1885 and he replaces Dessane as organist at of Saint-Roch until 1881. In 1871, he becomes one of the founding members of the Haydn Septuor where he plays the violin. Later he becomes secretary and then president. Fedora Venner, who he marries on June 5, 1872, occasionally participates as a singer. Their daughter Irma will later become the first francophone female doctor in the province of Quebec.

In 1880, he becomes the director of the Quatuor vocal taking Calixa Lavallée's position. That same year, a committee is put in place by the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste to create a Canadian national anthem. Nazaire accepts the responsibility of secretary of the committee.

The story of the creation of our national anthem and the committee was written by Nazaire himself in La Presse of December 11, 1920. He was, at that time, one of three surviving witnesses of the birth of the patriotic song.

The public demanded an anthem. Judge A.-B. Routhier wrote the words for "O Canada". At that time, the Honourable Théodore Robitaille, Lieutenant-governor of the province of Quebec, was very interested in finding an anthem. After reading judge Routhier's poem, he asks Lavallée to write the music for O Canada.

Lavallée got to work. After many meetings with Arthur Lavigne, Jéhin-Prume and sometimes Nazaire Levasseur, the music committee of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste wants to give it an official context. Nazaire told Lavallée of the committee's desire to make this song the national anthem who received "officially" the mandate to write the anthem.

This is how Nazaire witnessed and became involved in the creation of O Canada, which was played publicly for the first time by the Quatuor vocal of Quebec on 24 June 1880 on the Plains of Abraham. Nazaire was probably present at this historic occasion. One final note: Nazaire and Calixa Lavallée became such good friends that Lavallée was the godfather of Nazaire's son Fernand.

In 1885, Metis Louis Riel was at the centre of the North-West Rebellion. Nazaire took part in this campaign as a captain in the Ninth Regiment of the Voltigeurs de Quebec. When he came back, he was promoted major. He was one of the first to make peace with the Metis and to learn their language.

Nazaire also became counsellor to heads of states. In 1877, Wilfrid Laurier, 36, leader of the Liberal Party of Quebec, seeks election in the federal elections but is defeated in Drummond-Arthabaska. Judging that Laurier is an honest politician with a bright future and which Canada needs, he organizes a delegation sponsored by L'Événement to offer him the county of Québec-Est. Laurier later became the seventh prime minister of Canada (1896 to 1911) and the first francophone to hold the position.

This gesture is worth a reward so his political friends give him the post of gas and light inspector, which he held for many years. Other republics give him the title of consul of their countries: Brazil, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Chili to name a few.

Nazaire becomes in 1894 the first editor of the newspaper *La Semaine Commerciale* (The Commercial Week). He has also helped to found the *Société de géographie de Québec* (Quebec Geographical Society) in 1880 and wrote articles on the history and geography in the society's journal from 1884 to 1913. He became assistant archivist secretary, vice-president in 1889 and honorary president in 1897. Nazaire also participates in geographical studies: the first in 1884 on Lake Winnipeg and on the Mackenzie River in 1919 for which he was highly praised for by European geographers. He encourages Joseph Bernier to explore the Arctic.

Nazaire wrote at least three books: *Têtes et figures* (Québec, 1920), *Réminiscences d'antan: Québec il y a 70 ans* (Québec, 1926) and *Histoire de la musique de Québec*. He also wrote hundreds of articles in L'Événement for ten years. In the magazine *La Musique*. He writes between 1919 and 1922 monthly chronicles under the title "*Musique et musiciens à Québec: Souvenirs d'un amateur*".

He also composed music: *Aurora Snow Shoe Club* (1884), *Le Jour de l'An* (1887) (New Year's Day), *On me disait* (1887) (They Told Me), *Chanson à Flora; chanson contre Crémazie* (1862), *Chant patriotique* (1862) (Patriotic Songs), *La chanson de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste* and *Chanson du Jour de l'An* (1866). He composed a score for string quintet, a military march and many others.

#### Références:

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Encyclopédie de la musique au Canada.

# L'ASSOCIATION DES LEVASSEUR



L'Association des Levasseur d'Amérique inc. qui a été fondée en 1988 selon une charte fédérale est un organisme à but non lucratif dont les objectifs sont :

- De regrouper et d'unir le plus grand nombre de Levasseur ainsi que leurs descendants qui ont adopté le patronyme de Borgia, Carmel, Carmell, Vasseur, Vassor, Vasser.
- D'organiser des réunions et des rencontres susceptibles de renforcer les liens entre les membres de la grande famille Levasseur.
- De promouvoir, de développer et de diffuser les connaissances historiques et généalogiques des familles Levasseur par le biais de son site Internet, par la publication d'un « Bulletin » électronique et imprimé trois fois par année, ainsi que par la publication de dictionnaires généalogiques.
- De maintenir et procéder à la mise à jour continue d'une base de données généalogiques dont la consultation est offerte à ses membres en tout temps par Internet.
- De mettre à la disposition de ses membres un album de photos de famille ainsi que les Bulletins qui ont été publiés par l'Association des Levasseur depuis 1988.
- D'honorer la mémoire des ancêtres et de leurs descendants par le biais de monuments, de plaques ou de symboles pour marquer les événements historiques de la grande famille des Levasseur.
- De recueillir tous les documents susceptibles de créer des archives informatisées et imprimées qui constitueront le patrimoine de l'association où pourront puiser historiens et généalogistes.

*Dites-nous d'où venaient vos grands-parents, comment et à quel endroit ils se sont installés en Amérique, le type de travail qu'ils ont fait, les enfants qu'ils avaient et leurs réalisations. Ce type d'information pourrait être publié dans le Bulletin. En outre, si vous avez de vieilles photos de famille disponibles, ces photos pourraient être incorporées dans notre section d'archives photographiques. Ce faisant, les générations futures de votre famille Levasseur auront un enregistrement de cette information dans les archives de l'association. Sinon, cette information pourrait être perdue à jamais. Nous avons donc hâte de recevoir de vos nouvelles.*

Faites partie de notre équipe de bénévoles, contactez-nous !

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