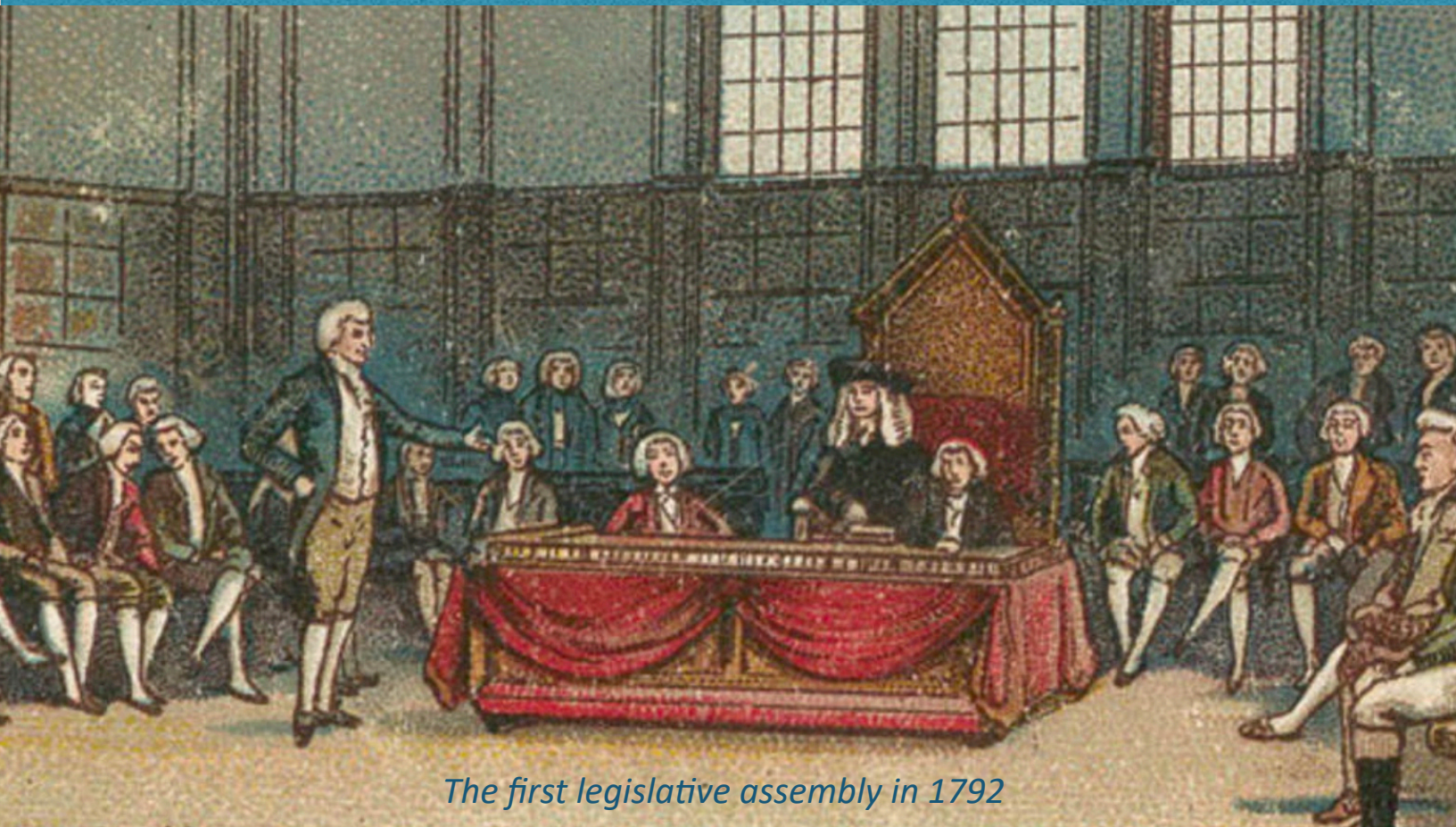


Levasseur & Carmel families



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The first legislative assembly in 1792

JOSEPH LEVASSEUR BORGIA (1773 TO 1839)

by: Alex Levasseur (662)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Who was Joseph LeVasseur Borgia? Before getting into it, let's try to set up the historical context in which he lived. He was born in Québec city 10 years after the signing of the [Treaty of Paris](#), which marked the end of Nouvelle-France and the beginning of the english regime. And he would die shortly after the events known as the «rebellion of the patriots», and just before the adoption of the [Act of Union](#) which will merge together Lower and Upper Canada, as requested by the Loyalists, those anglophones who had fled the American colonies during the War of Independence.

WHO WAS JOSEPH LEVASSEUR BORGIA

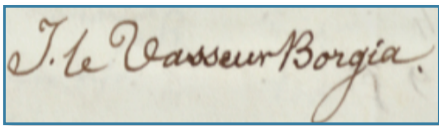
Joseph is a fourth generation descendant of Pierre Levasseur dit l'Espérance, originally from Paris. His father was Louis LeVasseur Borgia, blacksmith, and his mother was Marie-Anne Trudel, all from Québec city. Joseph [was born on January 6, 1773](#) in Québec city and he [would die there on June 27, 1839](#).

Why then «Borgia» when his ancestors bore the name of «Levasseur dit l'Espérance»? Our answer comes from [Philippe Baby Casgrain](#):

It is in the 1716 census of Québec city, published by abbé Beaudet in 1887, that we find for the first time in this country, the name Borgia, which is a Spanish name.

It was given at baptism, in Quebec City, on April 4, 1707, to François-Louis de Borgia, and carried in the census as François de Borgia, 10 year old son of Pierre LeVasseur, a 55 year old carpenter, and his second wife Anne Ménage, 40 years old, living on the street that runs along the Garden of the fort (des Carrières). The name was given to their child in honour and under the patronage of St-François de Borgia who had recently (1671) been canonized.

(1)



It is therefore Joseph's grandfather who passed down this forename which became a surname to his descendants. Moreover Joseph used to sign: LeVasseur Borgia.

The historian [Jean-Marie Lebel](#) tells us:

« Joseph Levasseur spent the early years of his childhood in the St-Jean suburbs of Quebec City. He was seven years old by the time his family moved to upper town within the walls of Quebec City, on Ste-Famille street, close to the junior seminary. In fact he did classical studies at that establishment from 1786 to 1792. Accused of having attended a play at the theatre he was expelled from the seminary at the end of April 1790, to be readmitted the following year, but this time as a boarder.» (2)



According to the « [Journal de l'instruction publique](#) », he, along with four other students, «defended around the same time (1792) a thesis in algebra, geometry, rectilinear and spherical trigonometry, conical sections, the theory of the dropping of bombs and astronomy.» (3)

Mr LeVasseur Borgia then went on to study law; he received his lawyer's degree in July 1800 and opened an office in Quebec City. He will have one child only: Charles-Narcisse, born in 1804. There would be no other descendants so this would mark the end of Joseph LeVasseur Borgia's lineage.

JOSEPH LEVASSEUR BORGIA - THE LAWYER



Philippe Aubert de Gaspé

Joseph LeVasseur Borgia quickly made a name for himself within the Quebec Bar of lawyers and it is said that he acquired a good reputation. He was neither a brilliant nor an eloquent orator. However he was a rigorous and feared litigator. [Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé](#), lawyer and author, tells us in his memoirs:

« Someone pointed out to him one day (to Sir James Craig) that Mr Borgia, who had pleaded before him that morning, was not naturally eloquent: «That is true, he said; but I believe there are few lawyers in this colony who possess such deep knowledge of roman law.» And Sir James was not mistaking». ⁽⁴⁾

Mr de Gaspé also relates this anecdote: a young clerk studying law at the office of the lawyer Joseph LeVasseur Borgia asked his master which book of law he recommended for him to read? And Mr Borgia to reply:

«In spite of all his studies and practice of law, he felt that there were «so many anomalies and contradictions in the laws that govern us, that it is difficult to find your way in this inextricable maze of roman and french codes, Coutume de Paris, english statutes, provincial statutes; and what else? If you ask me, my dear, you will read none.»

Furthermore it is for this reason that he fought in favour of abandoning the french law known as "[Coutume de Paris](#)", and replacing it with the much simpler English common law. He brought forth several resolutions to the Lower Canada Chamber of Assembly (precursor of the Quebec Parliament) to adopt this customary english law, but in vain. Here are two of the resolutions that he proposed:



Lower Canada Parliament and the Prescott Gate on Côte de la Montagne, in 1805, according to a drawing by John Lambert. (Library of the National Assembly).

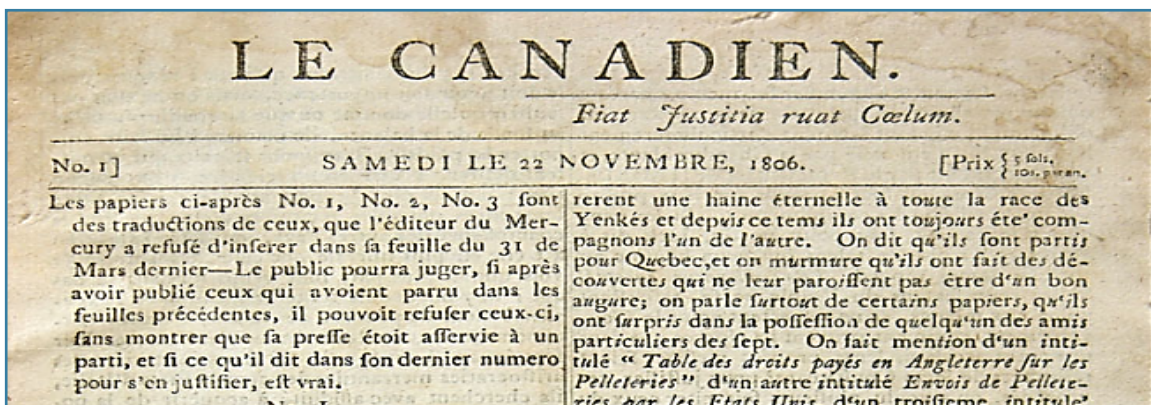
« Mr Borgia has proposed to resolve, seconded by Mr Després, that for these purposes and in the light of the excellence achieved by the public Law in England, with what is currently in force in this province, it is expedient that we introduce this private law here, such as is currently in force in England. Proposition rejected: 7 against 15»

« Mr Borgia has proposed to resolve, seconded by Mr Lee, that it is expedient to repeal the Coutume de Paris, Customary Law, the Ways and Customs, the Edicts, Arrests, Ordinances and Declarations of the Most Christian Kings, such as are now in force in this Province and Civil Law, as long as it can be in force in this Province. Proposition rejected 1 against 21» ⁽⁵⁾

Joseph LeVasseur Borgia was very much interested by politics, and we will come back to that in the next chapter. However this interest caused him a lot of worries; it is also for this reason that he was practically penniless at the end of his life. Quebec historian Jean-Marie Lebel wrote:

« The final years of LeVasseur Borgia's life were darkened by poverty and the loss of his son Narcisse-Charles. The latter had completed his articles as a clerk under his supervision starting in 1825 and obtained his lawyer's licence on February 27, 1830. It was said that he had inherited his talents as a lawyer from his father. Of frail health, he passed away at the age of 30, on November 5, 1834. Quite poor, LeVasseur Borgia had to count on the generosity of the lawyers of Quebec City, who joined forces to pay for his son's funerals. He had neglected his legal practice in order to devote himself more to his political career, and it was not long before he developed serious financial problems and, by 1817 he was forced to let his library go. »(6)

The newspaper LE CANADIEN



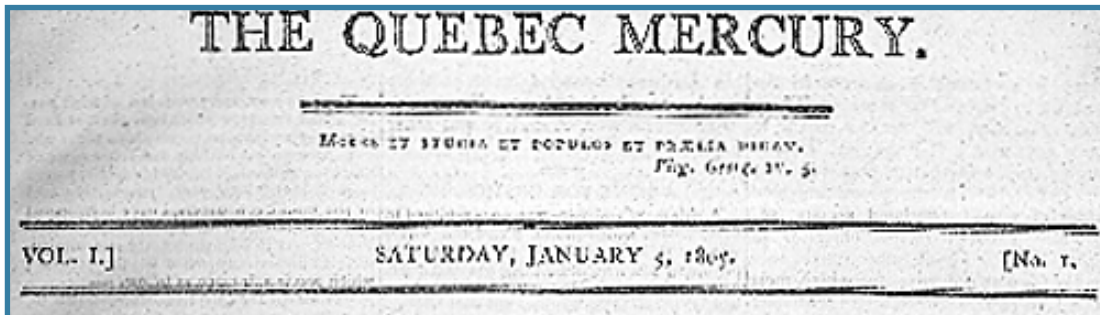
The first issue of the newspaper Le Canadien appears in Quebec City on Saturday, November 22, 1806. It was founded by the leader of the Parti Canadien, Pierre-Stanislas Bédard, with the help of several key figures of the emerging reformist movement, François Blanchet, Jean-Thomas Taschereau, Louis Bourdage, Joseph-Bernard Planté and Joseph LeVasseur Borgia.

According to the Canadian Encyclopedia:

The newspaper was created to defend and promote the political agenda of the Parti Canadien, an alliance of Lower Canada deputies - anglophones and francophones - who wished to reform the government of Lower Canada. Born around 1804, the Parti Canadien becomes the first political party in Canadian history. Created to counter the Quebec Mercury, which was the voice of the mercantile British elite (or Clique du Château), Le Canadien seeks a responsible government leading an elected assembly. It also fights against the Clique du Château's assimilation objectives, and defends the interests of the

French Canadian nation. In its beginnings, Le Canadien is not published for long periods, because its constant opposition frustrates the governor James Craig, who shares the opinions of the Clique du Château and so decides to have the editors arrested and imprisoned in March of 1810. The newspaper's offices are vandalized and the printing presses are confiscated, which forces Le Canadien to temporarily cease its activities. (7)

On June 14, 1808, Governor Craig discharges Levasseur and the other founding members of the newspaper, from their posts as officers in the militia. In 1810, unlike his colleagues, Levasseur Borgia avoids jail, thanks to his excellent reputation as a lawyer and to his more moderate views.



Sir James Henry Craig
huile sur toile de Thomas
Lawrence datant de 1806-1807

Shortly after, Governor Craig is recalled to London because his authoritarian rule is seen as too strict. He will be replaced by Sir George Prevost.

In 1812 a military conflict breaks out between Great Britain and the United States creating waves that are felt all the way to the Canadian colonies. Governor Prevost tries to get on the good side of the French Canadians



Sir George Prevost
Bibliothèque et Archives Canada/
MIKAN 4302159

and goes as far as to restore Levasseur Borgia to his post in the militia with the rank of captain in the first battalion of Quebec City. But conflicts will arise as Levasseur Borgia has disagreements with colonel Perreault:

« He was arrested and summoned to a court martial on November 9 and December 9, 1812, facing accusations of having disobeyed his superior, lieutenant colonel Perreault, in trying to «destroy order and military discipline». He was finally acquitted. »

« This battalion (of Joseph LeVasseur Borgia) was called to arms on September 24, 1812 and will be on duty until January 2, 1813. » (9)

JOSEPH LEVASSEUR BORGIA - THE DEPUTY

Right from the start of his career, Joseph LeVasseur Borgia was attracted by politics. In October 1805, he will become candidate for the riding of Upper Town Quebec City, for the Chamber of Assembly, in order to fill the void left by the passing of deputy William Grant. Another French Canadian is a candidate as well: Perreault. The splitting of the French language voters would allow an anglophone candidate, John Blackwood, to be elected. This would merely represent a delay, because as early as 1808, during the general elections, he will be elected deputy in the Cornwallis riding. His territory comprises the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River between La Pocatière and Cap-Chat. Cornwallis is one of the 27 electoral districts established during the creation of Lower Canada by the constitutional Act of 1791. It was a district jointly represented by two deputies. When the electoral map was redrawn in 1829, Cornwallis was divided into two districts : Kamouraska and Rimouski. Borgia represented this riding until 1830, except for the period between 1820 and 1824.

In 1827, a parliamentary crisis occurs in the Chamber of Assembly. Governor Dalhousie refuses to recognize and to accept the election of Louis-Joseph Papineau as Speaker (president) of the Chamber. So begins a stubborn conflict between the King's representative in Canada, Sir John Ramsay, 9th earl of Dalhousie, and the deputies.

Mister Papineau and gentlemen of the Chamber of Assembly, I am ordered by by His Excellency the governor in chief to inform you that His Excellency does not approve of the choice made by the Assembly for it's Speaker, and consequently, His Excellency rejects and discharges him. And it is His Excellency's wish that you, gentlemen of the Chamber of Assembly, immediately return where the Assembly normally hold it's sessions and that you make the choice of another person to be your Speaker and that you present the person so chosen for the approval of His Excellency, in this Chamber next Friday (November 23) at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. This veritable declaration of war of the executive power against a Chamber of Assembly with a large majority is perceived, if not as a coup d'Etat, at least as a show of force, similar to the one attempted by James Craig in 1810 against Pierre Bédard and the Chamber of Assembly dominated by the Parti Canadien. (10)

The deputies return to their chambers and adopt 5 resolutions showing the authority of the Chamber to elect it's Speaker. Joseph LeVasseur Borgia, one of the veterans in the Chamber, friend of Pierre Bédard and collaborator at Le Canadien newspaper in 1806, pronounces a long speech which is well documented in the support of the resolutions : « The Speaker is not created by the King, [...] he is the officer of the Assembly, the officer of the people, elected by the

people, to cooperate in making the law. » At the same occasion, the deputy Levasseur Borgia recalls the Three-Estate system used until 1789 and the fall of Louis XVI, with direct references to the events of the French Revolution. This quarrel with the English authority takes on enormous public proportions;



Louis-Joseph Papineau
Bibliothèque et Archives
Canada /MIKAN 2895718

In 1810 Pierre Bédard had fought alone or nearly alone in the face of the authoritarianism of governor Craig and the intransigence of the « clique du Château ». In 1827, Papineau and his party were in a position to mobilize the entire colony against the maneuvers of the Dalhousie government and the colonial oligarchy. Fortified by their experience in the 1822 and 1823 anti-unionist popular rallies, the patriots organize citizen meetings where the tone of rejection goes up a notch. (12)

This parliamentary crisis carries over to the Canadian and British newspapers. Popular mobilization is swift in all of the regions. LeVasseur Borgia is very active in the public meetings in Quebec; in the end it will be the demotion of Dalhousie, and his replacement with Governor Kempt that will bring appeasement.

The political events of 1827 in Lower Canada follow a course which will reach its peak with the uprisings of 1837 and 1838. Never before had Canadians rallied to such an extent over a political issue. With his frontal attack against the Assembly and its Speaker, governor Dalhousie had provoked a shaking of the people which would mark a stage in the colonial political conflict. (13)

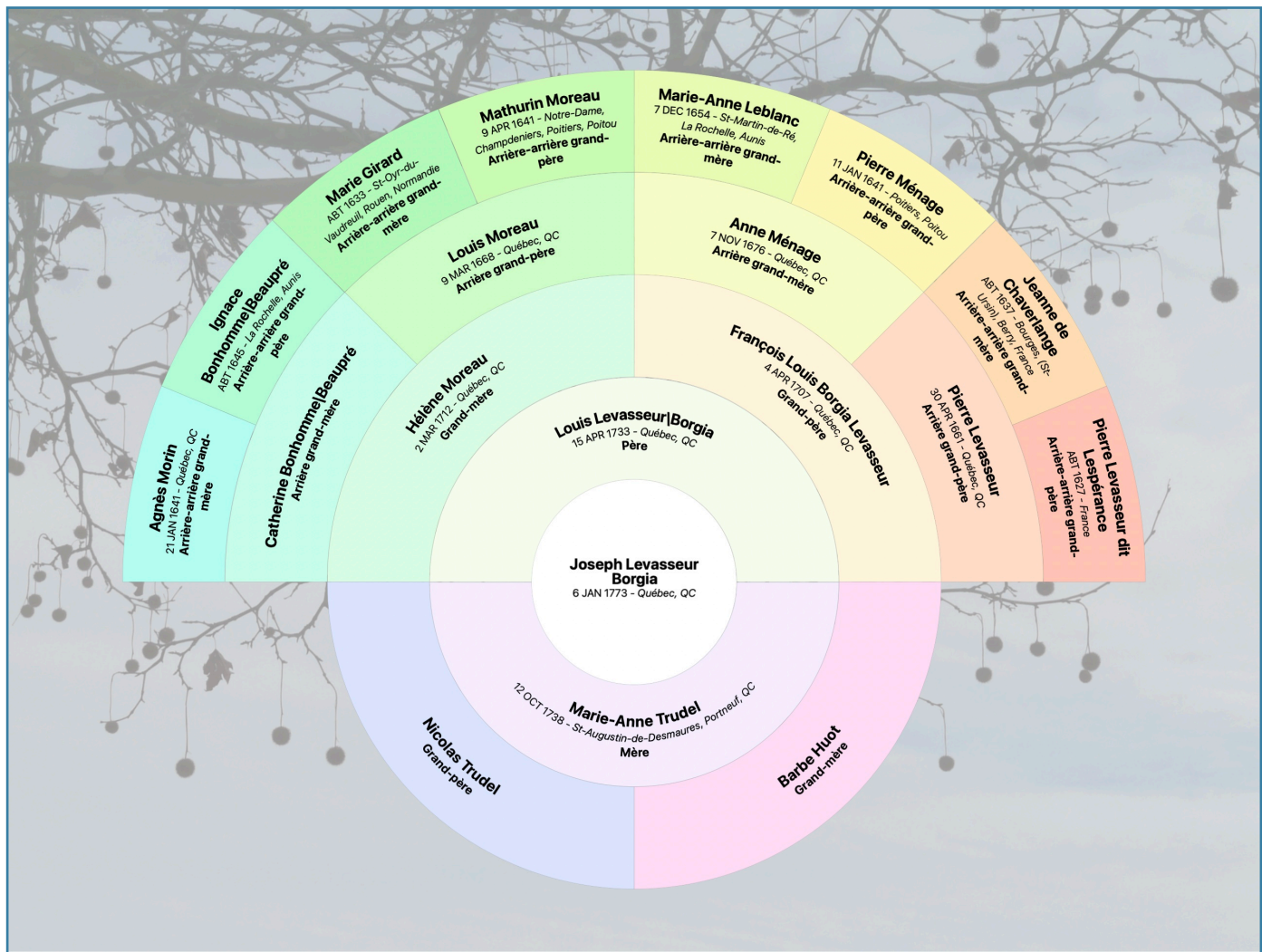
In his memoirs, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé would say of his colleague Joseph LeVasseur Borgia :

During the 1819 session, Mr Borgia who had protested against the offensive interruptions during debates, was himself a victim of his own anger. He was placed under the guard of the sergeant-at-arms for having called the deputy for Effingham, Mr Samuel Sherwood, an imbecile. (14)

In his memoirs, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé would say of his colleague Joseph LeVasseur Borgia:

« Mr Borgia, adds Mr de Gaspé, was unselfish, generous and of remarkable kindness and consideration. All praise to his memory ! A tear for the sadness of his old age. He had neglected his affairs to take care of politics and he died very poor ; because politics was not then as now the road to fortune. » (15)

Thanks to Pierre LeVasseur (002) for the translation of this text)



[Click on this link for the complete ascendance of Joseph LeVasseur Borgia](#)

- (1) Bulletin des recherches historiques, vol. 6, février 1900, no 2, page 39. par : Philippe Baby Casgrain
- (2) Jean-Marie Lebel, « LeVasseur Borgia, Joseph » dans Dictionnaire biographique du Canada, Université Laval/University of Toronto, 1988
- (3) Le Journal de l'instruction publique, Vol. 5, no 8/9 (août/sept. 1861), page 154
- (4) Mémoires, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec, Collection Littérature québécoise - Volume 190 : version 1.1 – page 420
- (5) Journal de l'Assemblée – 6 mars 1815
- (6) Jean-Marie Lebel, « LeVasseur Borgia, Joseph » dans Dictionnaire biographique du Canada, Université Laval/University of Toronto, 1988
- (7) <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr/article/le-canadien>
- (9) « Joseph Le Vasseur-Borgia » par Francis-J Audet, dans Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada, vol XIX, 1925, page 69
- (10) Gallichan, Gilles. (2012). La crise parlementaire de 1827 au Bas-Canada. Les Cahiers des dix, (66), pages 95–166
- (11) Joseph LeVasseur-Borgia, député de Cornwallis (Kamouraska-Rimouski), 22 novembre 1827
- (12) Gallichan, Gilles. (2012). La crise parlementaire de 1827 au Bas-Canada. Les Cahiers des dix, (66), pages 95–166
- (13) Gallichan, Gilles , op. cit
- (14) « Joseph Le Vasseur-Borgia » par Francis-J Audet, dans Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada, vol XIX, 1925, page 75
- (15) Mémoires, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec, Collection Littérature québécoise - Volume 190 : version 1.1 – page 373

LEVASSEUR & CARMEL FAMILIES



The Association, Levasseur d'Amérique Inc. is a non-profit organization, founded in 1988, in accordance to a federal charter. Its goals are:

- To join together and unite a large number of Levasseur and other descendants who have adopted the patronymic Borgia, Carmel, Carmell, Vasseur, Vassor, Vasser.
- To promote, develop and diffuse historical genealogical knowledge about the Levasseur families with Internet, an electronic Newsletter published three times per year also the publication of genealogical dictionaries.
- To maintain and update, on an ongoing basis, the genealogical data base available to members at all times on the Internet.
- To make available to members a family photo album and the Newsletters that the Association has published since 1988.
- To honor the memory of our forefathers and their descendants by way of monuments, plaques or symbolic gestures that commemorate historic events that are chronicle the Levasseur family.
- To gather all documents related to the Levasseur family for the purpose of constructing archives that will constitute the heritage of our Association and that will provide a source of information for historians and genealogists.

We would appreciate if you could send us family related documents that would add to our data base of archives and also enable us to continue the publication of the Levasseur Newsletter three times per year. The participation of the Levasseurs and members of their families is essential to allow us to pursue our mission. Send us your photos and texts for the next publication of the Newsletter. You can download them very easily with this new tool and by providing a brief description of the photo or text that is being sent. Following receipt of your documents, a copy of all information to be published in the Newsletter will be sent to you for approval prior to final publication.

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