

## LARGE GATHERINGS

For more than a hundred years, the Gagnon and Belzile have held several large gatherings to commemorate the arrival of their ancestors on Canadian land. These events took place during the years 1909, 1914, 1930, 1940, 1985, 1990 and 2015.

### 1st large gathering on September 15, 1909, in the parish of Sainte-Famille of Île d'Orléans

The first gathering was held to celebrate the 252nd anniversary of the establishment of the ancestor Robert at Île d'Orléans. This gathering was at the initiative of father LOUIS JOSEPH GAGNON, a direct descendant of the ancestor ROBERT. During 20 years, he had cherished the idea of honouring the memory of his ancestor ROBERT. His nomination to the Sainte-Famille parish gave him the opportunity to realize his project. He contacted other priests of the same surname so they could publicize this gathering in their respective church. On the other hand, he got from the owner of the ancestral property of Robert Gagnon, a site to install a monument and a cross. This site was located on the other side of the road, opposite the actual existing site with its cross and its memorial plate.

Hundreds of Gagnon, sixty-three priests, including fifty-two descendants of the ancestor Robert were at the gathering, in addition to notable figures, either religious, political and educational.

In the afternoon, the feast ended with the blessing of the monument with the cross. On the monument base, there was a marble plate with the following inscription:

**“In memory of Robert Gagnon, first owner of this land in  
1657.**

**One of his descendants, the Rev. Louis Joseph Gagnon,  
priest of this parish, with the generous support of 40 other  
priests,**

**all as him descendants from this brave ancestor,  
erected this humble monument of filial piety**

**September 15, 1909 ”**



It must be remembered that, in 1909, there was no road link between Île d'Orléans and the mainland, the bridge link being built in after 1935. Access to the island was by fluvial way from Quebec City or Beaupré.

### 2nd large gathering on August 31 and September 1, 1914 in Saint-Justin-de-Maskinongé

The second gathering was held to commemorate the significant contributions of Gagnon fellow citizens in the organization of the parish of Saint-Justin-de-Maskinongé, located south-west of the city of Trois-Rivières. It was organized by descendants of the ancestor MATHURIN. In the early 18th century, many Gagnon families settled in this region and contributed massively to the organization of the parish of Saint-Justin. Among the various activities of the gathering, there was in the program a unique theatre piece entitled "A grandson of Pierre Gagnon" signed by Claude Dupont, a pen name. It was a play written for the first time by a nun: Mother of the Holy Heart of Mary, born Marie-Alice Ferron, of the Congregation of the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières and played by a group of men and women.

### **3rd large gathering on July 2, 1930 in Île d'Orléans**

This gathering commemorated the establishment of the ancestor Robert Gagnon in Ste-Famille, Île d'Orléans, in 1657.

In the family archives of Mr. Jean-Paul Gagnon, genealogist, we find the following handwritten report:

"Through the commitment of Mr. Antoine Gagnon, a skilled organizer, several hundred Gagnon gathered on the land of their father in Nouvelle-France to taste for few hours the joy of family friendship. What can be provided by such a meeting to strengthen the bonds of their great family?

The program has been very interesting and full. Surrounded by the sound of brass instruments of the orchestra La Tulipe, delegates went by boat to the Île d'Orléans, and by 9H30, they landed at Ste-Pétronille where cars and buses were waiting for the group to get to Ste-Famille and set foot on the land of their ancestor ROBERT with the musicians.

At two o'clock, despite rain and mud, a main group of the most courageous and enthusiasm left the house of Mr. Turcotte and went down the slope to the shore, where accosted ROBERT GAGNON in 1655. They went into this place for the unveiling of a new plate that Mr. Antoine Gagnon ordered and raised and on which was engraved:

**"HERE SETTLED AROUND 1657 ROBERT GAGNON**

**BORN IN VENTROUZE, FRANCE, ON MARCH 1628**

**JULY 2, 1930"**

Mrs. Henry Dessaint received the honour of unveiling the plate.

This plate no longer exists.

### **4th large gathering on September 14, 1940 in Quebec City**

It has been a great rally that drew more than 1000 participants from the province of Quebec and the United States to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the establishment of the three brothers Mathurin, Jean and Pierre Gagnon in Nouvelle-France.

On a morning of May 1940, thousands of cards addressed to the Gagnon descendants in Quebec City and Montreal. Cards were mailed in a post office of North-East of Pennsylvania, United States by Antoine Gagnon. These cards were inviting the descendants of Gagnon family to commemorate the third centenary of the arrival in Quebec of Canadian ancestors of their great family.

From May to August 1940, committees were formed by volunteers and meetings were held to set up this major event. Roland Gagnon, active committee general secretary, wrote in the souvenir book:

"Already the general mobilization of all Gagnon descendants was declared; then it was time to intensify propaganda, opening any major records of enrolment, distribute grades to instruct recruits, in order to put in motion a huge army. Once all the subcommittees were organized,

we had to find the exact location where should be placed the modest souvenir of the celebration. Reverend Father Julien told me and proved with deeds that lands of the first three Gagnon were contiguous. Plans in hand, we localised where they were. Would this plate be placed on the lot of Mathurin, the eldest of three Gagnon? Ironically, this lot was located between those of Jean and Pierre and no longer belonged to the descendants of Mathurin. The same situation existed for Pierre's lot. What should we do? By decision of the committee, the matter was settled: the plate had to be put on the land of Mathurin, the head of the family. This decision could not possibly create dissent among the thousands of descendants of the three branches, because the plate would be placed in the center of the Gagnon's land. Moreover, it is only later that we heard that the Jean's lot was still belonging to one of his descendants, Louis Gagnon.

As the banquet was to be held at the Chateau Frontenac, I made all the arrangements in order to serve at least 700 guests. Mr. Neal, the manager, and Mr. Drury, the butler, pledged that every thing would be overlooked to receive worthily the Gagnon family wishing to attend the banquet. They kept their word, and I must say they were able to prepare a cheerful decoration.

Only one thing worried the organizers. How to end this feast of September 14? What would be done in the evening? Would we separate us as soon after the banquet without doing anything to close this day started so well? It would not meet our satisfaction. Canon Cyrille Gagnon settled the case for the afternoon. Descendants of Mathurin, Jean and Pierre Gagnon would attend a celebration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, in the lower city. Meanwhile, the descendants of Robert Gagnon would make a pilgrimage in Sainte-Famille of Île d'Orléans at the lot of their ancestor. The evening case had still to be settled. What to do? André Gagnon pulled us out. Always alert, he informed the active committee that the priest of the parish of St. Joachim, Father JP Chalifour, had grouped some amateur artists of his parish who played a theatrical piece called "A little-son of Pierre Gagnon." Eureka! We finally found something that would help closing this ever memorable day of September 14.

On September 11, everything was ready to receive cousins. We were only waiting for the arrival of the promoter of the third centenary celebrations, Mr. Antoine Gagnon.

Hereafter, the gathering program of the 300th anniversary of the establishment of the ancestors Mathurin, Jean and Pierre:

8 h 45 Gathering at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré.

9 h 00 Great mass and sermon.

10 h 45 Panoramic photo of Gagnon



11 h 15 Departures for Château-Richer.

- 11 h 30 Unveiling of the commemorative plaque installed on lot of Mathurin Gagnon, the eldest of the three brothers, followed by speeches
- 12 h 30 Departures for Quebec.
- 13 h 30 Dinner at the Chateau Frontenac, speeches, songs, music.
- 17 h 00 Pilgrimage at church Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, Quebec the store of Gagnon brothers. This is specially organized for the descendants of the three Gagnon brothers Mathurin, Jean and Pierre.
- 17 h 00 Trip to Sainte-Famille, Île d'Orléans, the land of Robert Gagnon, the cousin of the three brothers, held for the descendants of Robert Gagnon.
- 18 h 00 Free time.
- 20 h 15 Meeting at the Room Promotions of Laval University, where will be played the theatrical piece called "A little-son of Pierre Gagnon"



### **5th large gathering on August 17, 1985 in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré**

Brother Armand Gagnon has been the instigator and organizer of the event. In the spring of 1985, following to foundation of the corporation "Les familles Gagnon et Belzile 1635-1985.", he immediately set to work and programmed the celebration for August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1985. In the special issue of the journal La Gagnonnière, he wrote:

“Dear cousins,

On August 17, you were coming from Canada, United States and elsewhere to celebrate with us a memorable anniversary, the 350<sup>th</sup> of the arrival of the first three Gagnon in America. On behalf of the members of the Corporation of Families Gagnon and Belzile, I want to tell you our pride and satisfaction for your eager response to our invitation and congratulate you most sincerely.

The precious legacy to our great family is the result of work and perseverance of our ancestors. If the story of these determined people is stirring, that of their descendants ever since is not less. By celebrating the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary together, we have made a filial tribute to our grandparents, our parents and at all Belzile\ Gagnon. This day of rejoicing fellowship will remain unforgettable. Maybe, will it be among the most beautiful moments of our lives?

This is to remind you those precious memories that your corporation has decided to use a significant portion of its profits to give you free of charge this special issue of the journal: La Gagnonnière. Of course, future issues will be shipped only to those who have renewed their membership card for 1986.

The monument, built in memory of our ancestors on the Porch Park Place Royale, a few days before the party, remind the gesture of today's Gagnon and Belzile for future generations. Our armorial bearings will express our pride in belonging to this family and our motto will remain a rallying expression.



To all of those who contributed, directly or indirectly to the organization of our gathering or to the preparation of this remembering issue of La Gagnonnière, I sincerely thank you.

As the holidays approach, let me take this opportunity to wish one and all, on behalf of the corporation members, a very Merry Christmas, a happy New Year and heaven at the end of your days.

### **Armand Gagnon”**

Gagnon-Belzile families have made a rendezvous to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupre on August 17, 1985 at 10 am. At nine o'clock, several hundred people were already there. This sixth largest gathering attracted nearly 3,000 people in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. The ancestors, dressed with historical costumes, greet visitors and hostesses indicating the different outdoor and indoor kiosks where they can register, inquire about the program for the day and buy some souvenirs.

The Gagnon-Belzile are then invited to visit an exhibition of archives and photos of their ancestors. This exhibition, organized by the research work of Denise Gagnon-Roussin, raises a great interest. In the same time, the religious committee, under the responsibility of Mr. Gabriel Gagnon, prepares the Eucharistic celebration scheduled for 11:30 AM. In a crowded basilica, every moment of this grand ceremony is hosted by the Gagnon-Belzile: celebration, homily, readings, offerings and music.



The mass being over, all were grouped in front of the basilica for a souvenir photo; after that, it has been the country dinner. Some settled on a bench, some on patch of grass or near their car. People took the opportunity to rest before beginning the visit of the sites of the ancestors.

Buses were available for those interested. Leaving Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, they headed to Château-Richer, where the houses and the monument remembering the three Gagnon brothers (Mathurin, Jean Pierre), and to Sainte-Famille of Île d'Orléans where are the house and the monument of remembrance of Cousin Robert Gagnon. All ancestral homes were decorated for the occasion. What joys and emotions for many to see these places and for others to discover them! All came back delighted.

For some, the festival ends with a visit to the market place of Gagnon brothers at Place Royale, but for a large number (979), it is only suspended, to resume at eight o'clock, at the Hilton Hotel Quebec, where an excellent dinner is served with a surrounding music. The service is excellent. Rodolphe Gagnon provides lively dinner and introduces the speakers: gentlemen Armand and Jean-Paul Gagnon. After dinner, room for dancing. The party ends around one o'clock in the morning. This wonderful day, made even more beautiful with the help of Mother Nature, is due to the tireless work of a team under the chairmanship of Mr. Armand Gagnon to whom we owe our thanks. Over three thousand Gagnon-Belzile leave enthusiastic, satisfied and happy. Everybody hopes that such celebrations are renewed more frequently.

## **6th large gathering on August 10, 11 and 12, 1990 in Mont-Sainte-Anne**

This gathering attracted nearly 400 participants to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the three Gagnon ancestors in Château-Richer.



Hereafter is the report of Mr. Gilles Gagnon, president of the organization committee:

“Around the years 1637 to 1638, three Gagnon brothers left Tourouvre and Ventrouze, in Perche, France, and came to settle in the Place Royale and Château-Richer on arrival. The map of Villeneuve indicates their presence in 1640 in Château-Richer and one of them, Jean, married there in September of the same year.

What a meeting we had! The organizing committee on which I could count over the past year has spared nothing to make this celebration a tribute to our ancestors and to all those who have valued and maintained up today their reputation as brave, hardworking, determined and ready to take on any challenge.

These brave pioneers helped to base a country, to establish their own and all their descendants on a land maybe rich, but welcoming in a country with harsh climates. Try to imagine what the first settlers had to suffer hardships, misery, difficulties of all kinds to successfully master and tame all the elements of nature. It seemed to us that these heroes and heroines were entitled to be celebrated, honoured, respected and thanked for everything they have done in helping to build a nation in America.

During these celebrations, regardless of the inconvenience caused by the execrable temperature of Saturday, August 11, we lived unforgettable moments. Moreover, the numerous comments, received during the rally and after by post, well indicated satisfaction of cousins present and are likely, make those who did not come, feel sorry to have missed the opportunity to live such unforgettable moments. How can we forget the emotions we experienced during the celebration at the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica by the Eminence, Cardinal Edward M. Gagnon, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family?

Pride was great for cousins to see that a Cardinal, and moreover a Gagnon, had agreed to come especially from Rome for the occasion. Many insisted during the day to keep a memory on film of this illustrious prelate with a family member.

The unveiling of the plaque was obviously done inside the Château Mont Sainte-Anne, thanks to the collaboration of Mr. Alphonse Gagnon. The plate is clearly visible on his property now. The ceremony took place in the afternoon and was a success with an atmosphere of camaraderie.



What about the intensity felt by everyone on Saturday night! It was, remember, the evening of the banquet, and tributes, the André Gagnon's concert and of dance that followed and ended the evening. Everything went just wonderful for this particular activity: succulent meals, appreciated stakeholders and speeches. However, the highlight of the evening, in my humble opinion, is related to the participation of our internationally renowned pianist André Gagnon. We have experienced the full range of emotions: What bliss! So charming! How sweet! What serenity! What joy! These were thoughts I had thanks and I still do. This concert made us forget the problems experienced during the day due to Mother Nature.

Those who went to the Place Royale next day, with expert guides to visit the Porch Park dedicated to the Gagnon family, the church Notre-Dame des Victoires, the magnificent Place Royale and the surroundings were delighted.

To avoid that such a feast does not end up in a short-lived success, I urge you to support your Family association Gagnon and Belzile, to encourage your friends and family to join the association, to undertake research on your ancestors, researching the mystery of your roots, trace your genealogy if it is not already done. You will experience moments of joy and it will be the best extension that the gathering of the 350th will have provided you.

**Gilles Gagnon**, President, organisation committee"

## 7th large gathering on August 08, 2015, in Quebec City

In early August 2015, we held in Quebec City The 7th great gathering of Gagnon and Belzile to celebrate the 375th anniversary of the establishment at Château-Richer, of the three ancestors' brothers Gagnon, Mathurin, Jean and Pierre. And what a festive gathering! Hereafter is a brief summary.

The celebrations had several components and unfolded along the New France Festival (FNF).

From August 6 to 9, the family received visitors at a shop installed on Unesco Park of Quebec, Saint-Pierre street, at the same location where the three Gagnon brothers had owned a business establishment (picture 1 and 2).



Photo 1 par Rina Ganon



Photo 2 par Madeleine Vandal Gagnon

On August 6, specifically, the Gagnon family and Belzile was being honoured by FNF: After calling of a crier, the general director of FNF, Mr. Stephan Parent, invited in a short speech the founding members Gagnon and Belzile family.

An improvised show embodies our ancestors was then presented to an audience of about a hundred people (picture 3).



Photo 3 par Madeleine Vandal Gagnon

On August 8, six conferences were presented (picture 4): 1 – “Gagnon family from France, a noble family” by Jean-Paul Gagnon, genealogist; 2 – “Belzile Family, descendant of Gagnon” by Jean-Claude Gagnon, genealogist, (picture 5); 3 – “Two hundred years of history in the lives of Gagnon” by Jacqueline Gagnon, author; 4 – “Treasures in your papers families” by Gilles Cayouette genealogist, Genealogy Society of Quebec; 5 – “The Gagnon of Québec City” by Jean-Marie Lebel, historian; 6 – “Les Filles du Roy, Mothers of the Quebec nation” by Irene Belleau, historian researcher.



Photo 4 par Gilles Gagnon



Photo 5 par Rina Gagnon

Alongside these conferences, participants could opt for charter bus tours to visit places of ancestral lands of the three brothers, in Château-Richer (picture 6), or that of Robert Gagnon, their ancestor cousin on Île-d'Orléans (picture 7). Visits to the interpretation center of the Côte-de-Beaupré and of the “Maison de nos aïeux” on Île d'Orléans were also included. At the end of the day, 76 participants had visited one or other of these locations or even both.



Photo 6 par Rina Gagnon



Photo 7 par Henri-Louis Gagnon

At 6 p.m., August 8, the day continued with the raising of a glass in honour of Gagnon and Belzile families and with the sound of music by the Painchaud family (picture 8). Then people were invited to take place in the banquet hall (picture 9). Firstly in the program, a menu for fine mouths: entrance of half-cooked salmon with herbs and two mustards, velvety soup of celeriac and sky of Charlevoix, fake filet of braised veal in a main meal, dessert of “millefeuilles” with pastry cream, crispy at three chocolates, Apple Pie with cream of yesteryear, tea and coffee.



Photo 8 par Julien Gagnon



Photo 9 par Julien Gagnon

To liven up the evening, under the direction of the master of ceremonies, Mr. André Lavoie, a video had been prepared, by Gilles Gagnon and Carole Gagnon, to highlight the presence of Gagnon and Belzile in all spheres of activity of our society. The video began with a beautiful address of Mr. Régis Labeaume, Mayor of Québec. In addition to numerous photos, the video included an address and a performance by singer Francesca Gagnon (Allegria, Cirque du Soleil), a performance of the singer KlôPelgag (Cloé Pelletier-Gagnon) and an extract from the film of Jocelyne Gallant titled “Les métiers de Doré” (Mrs. Doréa Gagnon Belzile).

Finally, the evening concluded with a marvellous show of family Painchaud, virtuosos of musical instruments (picture 10).



Photo 10 par Mme Ivette Roussin



Photo 11 par Mme Ivette Roussin

The next day, August 9, took place the general assembly of the members of the association.

In total, the celebrations will be attended by about 200 participants, including 160 at the banquet, fifteen from the United States and as far away as Texas, and Europeans whose president of Gagnon Association of France, Jacqueline Gagnon Gillet. Above pictured with our newly elected president Roger Pomminville. (Picture 11)

Claude Belzile,  
Chairman of the organizing committee