

# History of the association

Most of the following texts are excerpts and adaptations of articles published in La Gagnonnière, and minutes of board meetings.

The current association "Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc." was born following the celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the arrival of the 3 Gagnon brothers in Quebec City (*which we thought was in 1635, whereas it was more in 1638*) held on August 17, 1985 in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré.

Brother Armand Gagnon, a Marist from Quebec City, was the instigator of this project, which he launched in 1984. Jean-Paul Gagnon of St-Lambert, who had begun the process of creating an association of Gagnon and Belzile, agreed to help him organize the celebrations.

A committee of 20 people, initiated and chaired by Brother Armand Gagnon, applied for letters patent for the "Les familles Gagnon - Belzile 1635-1685" company. The event was a huge success, with more than 3000 participants and 85 people registered for La Gagnonnière magazine. As a continuation of these celebrations, Brother Armand Gagnon organized a trip to the land of the ancestors in France from September 8 to 30.

These celebrations were the 5th of the large gatherings of Gagnon and Belzile recorded since 1909 and organized by two previous Gagnon associations.

- The first was created around 1909 during the rally for the erection of the monument dedicated to the ancestor Robert in Sainte-Famille, Île d'Orléans; followed by the rally of Mathurin's descendants in Saint-Justin de Maskinongé in 1914. It ended in 1915 during the First World War.
- The second, "Les Gagnon", with a periodical of the same name, was created around 1928 for Robert's 300th birthday in 1928 and the 300th anniversary of the establishment of the 3 brothers in Château-Richer in 1940. It also died in 1942 during the Second World War.

Detailed reports of the major gatherings can be found on the ACTIVITIES icon on the association's website.

Jean-Paul Gagnon approached Brother Armand Gagnon immediately after the 350th anniversary celebrations to have an association born of its burning embers, assuring him of his commitment and experience, having assisted his father and the father of pianist André Gagnon in the 2nd association. In the fall of 1985, an interim committee was formed: Brother Armand Gagnon, President; Denise Belzile-Buron, Vice-President; Me Claude Gagnon, Legal Counsel; Annette Belzile, Treasurer; and Jacqueline B-Fortier, Secretary.

On February 12, 1986, there were already 147 members. A first annual general meeting of the new association was held on March 8, 1986 in Sainte-Foy and a first board of directors was elected: Denise Belzile-Buron, president; Brother Armand Gagnon, vice-president; Annette Belzile, treasurer; Jacqueline B-Fortier, secretary; and Me Louis-Jacques Gagnon, notary public. An editorial board of the journal was also formed: Brother Armand Gagnon, President; Suzanne Gagnon-Lavallée, Secretary; and Annette Belzile, Shipping Agent. And

we looked for regional representatives: 01- Bas St-Laurent: Father Maurice Gagnon; 05- Estrie: Gerald Gagnon; 06 - Montréal Métro: Jean-Paul Gagnon; 08- Abitibi: Jean-Robert Gagnon; 09 - Côte Nord: Anne-Marie Gagnon.

A resolution was adopted to change the name of the company from 1984 to "**Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc.**", and another resolution to determine the first annual contribution at \$10, giving the right to four bulletins published annually. On October 25, following the resignation of Denise Belzile-Buron, Brother Armand Gagnon became Acting President and Suzanne Gagnon-Lavallée Vice-President.

At the AGM on May 16, 1987, the association accepted the objectives and general regulations, drafted by notary Louis-Jacques Gagnon, the association's legal director and advisor. And the board of directors became more imposing: president, 3 vice-presidents, treasurer, secretary, legal counsel, and 13 other directors from different regions of Quebec. In addition, an executive of the board composed of the president, treasurer, secretary, and a director. And the La Gagnonnière committee: president, secretary, translator and sender.

Over the years, the association has continued to grow. Since its foundation 34 years ago, some 1800 people have joined it. In 2020, nearly 350 people are active members and the Facebook page has more than 1,000 members.

Here is a chronology of events and actions that have marked the evolution of the association:

- 1985: formation of an interim committee;
- 1986: 1st AGM and 1st Board of Directors, amendment of the name of the 1984 charter for "Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc.", the membership fee is set at \$10/year;
- 1987: The rules and objectives of the association are approved;
- 1988: Father Lucien Godbout, heraldist, redesigns and modernizes the coat of arms used in 1985 and 1940; the association becomes a member of the Fédération des familles souches du Québec;
- 1989: dues increased to \$15/year; membership compilation and accounting is now done by computer;
- 1990: a 6th major gathering was organized in Ste-Anne-de-Baupré to mark the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the 3 Gagnon brothers in Château-Richer in 1640, with a plaque placed on an ancestral house on the concession of the ancestor Jean; publication of the book "La vie d'un pionnier à l'île d'Orléans" on the ancestor Robert by Christiane Perron; trip to France organized by J-Paul Gagnon; contribution increased to \$18/year;
- 1991: Visit of the Gagnon de France to Quebec;
- 1992: Quebec chapter is formed; the association participates in the organization of the 350th anniversary of the founding of Montreal; founding of the Association des Gagnon de France with the objective of promoting contacts with the Gagnon and Belzile of Quebec; Travel to France organized by J-Paul Gagnon;

- 1993: chapter of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is formed; launch of the book "Un fermier et ses défis" by Henri-Paul Gagnon;
- 1994: Bas-Saint-Laurent chapter is formed;
- 1995: Eastern Ontario chapter is created; commemorative plaque placed by the association in honour of the patriots of 1837 (Lucien Gagnon) at the church of Saint-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-Noix, former parish of St-Valentin; 10th anniversary of the foundation of the association in Sainte-Famille and Saint-Pierre on Île d'Orléans and 340th of the establishment of the ancestor Robert; launch of the book "Gagnon et Belzile" by Bro. Armand Gagnon and the cookbook "Gagnon et Belzile à table"; trip to France organized by Jean-Paul Gagnon and installation of a Québec-France plaque in honour of the ancestors Robert and Pierre Gagnon in the church of La Ventrouze; memorandum of understanding signed with the Association des Gagnon de France; beginning of the promotional items offer;
- 1996: Website of the "Gagnon-Belzile" association is launched; membership fee increases to \$20/year;
- 1997: Mauricie/Centre-du-Québec chapter is formed; the association's first presence at the Fêtes de la Nouvelle-France;
- 1998: trip to France/Switzerland/Italy organized by J-Paul Gagnon;
- 1999: Publication of 2 series (Robert, Robert-Belzile) of the Gagnon and Belzile genealogical dictionaries by Jean-Paul Gagnon;
- 2000: First appearance at the Salon de la généalogie in Place Laurier, Sainte-Foy; 15th anniversary of the founding of the association and 360th of the establishment of the 3 Gagnon brothers in Château-Richer; publication of 3 series (Mathurin, Jean, Pierre) of the Gagnon and Belzile genealogical dictionaries by Jean-Paul Gagnon; Montreal/Laval/Montérégie chapter is formed;
- 2001: publication of a book "Les Gagnon de France - Une famille", an essay on history and genealogy 1273-2000 by Jean-Paul Gagnon;
- 2002: plaque inaugurated at Village Gagnon Park in Limoges, Ontario; trip to France organized by J-Paul and Claude Gagnon;
- 2003: publication of the association's perpetual calendar;
- 2004: Visit of the Gagnon de France in Quebec;
- 2005: purchase of new computer equipment;
- 2006 : Award for the Volunteer Emeritus of the Fédération des familles souches du Québec to Jean-Paul Gagnon for his work (author of the Gagnon and Belzile genealogical dictionaries, administrator since the beginning of the association, organizer of several trips to France); Volunteer of the Year Award for Quebec from the Ordre de la GGA to Suzanne Vermette for her involvement in society; installation of a mural on the site of the 3 frères Gagnon store at Place Royale in Unesco Park; trip to France organized by J-Paul and J-Guy Gagnon;

- 2008: publication of a brochure "Les familles Gagnon et Belzile" (ancestors and association); compilation of the La Gagnonnière 1986-2007 bulletins on CD-ROM; the city of Saint-Basile-le-Grand named the "Salle Antonio Gagnon" (genealogist) at the public library to highlight its many services; visit of our Gagnon cousins in France;
- 2009: Inauguration of a window dedicated to the history of the Gagnon and Belzile families at the Centre d'interprétation de la Côte-de-Beaupré; contribution increased to \$25/year;
- 2010: restructuring: the Executive Committee is abolished and the Board of Directors is reduced from 15 to 9 directors and the general by-laws are completely revised; 25th anniversary of the association's foundation at the AGM in Trois-Rivières with tributes to Jacqueline B-Fortier, Colette Gagnon, Thérèse B-Gagnon, Gabrielle Gagnon, Louise Gagnon and Gabriel Gagnon; modification of the name of the www website.gagnon-belzile.com; meeting with the Gagnon families (Quebec, Maine, New Brunswick) at the Festival des Acadiens in Edmundston-Madawaska, Maine, USA; association survey to improve the content of the newsletter; trip to France organized by J-Guy Gagnon and Micheline Belzil;
- 2011: tribute to Jean-Paul Gagnon in France for his involvement in Canada-France relations in genealogy; launch of 2 genealogical books by Ernest Gagnon, around the Bas-St-Laurent/Gaspésie chapter;
- 2012: Donation to the association of a copy of the genealogical database of Jean-Paul Gagnon, genealogist from Victoriaville;
- 2014: Creation of the Facebook page "Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc." by Carole Gagnon, resp. external relations;
- 2015: 7th Large gathering in Quebec City to mark the 375th anniversary of the establishment in New France of the three Gagnon brothers (Mathurin, Jean and Pierre) in 1640, also marking the 30th anniversary of the association's founding;
- 2017: donation to the association of a copy of the genealogical database of Jean-Paul Gagnon, genealogist of St-Lambert; relaunch of the work to transfer genealogical data to a digital database for the association's website;
- 2018: Publication of a brochure entitled "Ernest Gagnon, un homme d'exception" by the Quebec/Chaudière-Appalaches chapter, following Suzanne Vermette's research;
- 2019: A trip to France organized by Jean-Paul Gagnon; opening of the association's new reconfigured website;

## **Objectives of the association**

- To bring together in an association the descendants of the Mathurin, Jean, Pierre and Robert Gagnon ancestors, as well as their parents and allies in America, to strengthen the ties that bind them to the same origins, using all available and permitted resources to encourage meetings, works, achievements, events of a social, patriotic, cultural and other similar nature, highlighting in particular historical anniversaries relating to one or another of the said ancestors or to their illustrious descendants;
- To hold, from time to time, meetings or assemblies of members outside Quebec;
- To encourage, promote and assist, according to the means and resources available, in the preparation of a complete genealogical inventory of the Gagnon and Belzile families on the American continent, which is related to the ancestors previously named, to support all research on the history of these families and to facilitate its dissemination;
- Receive donations of works and works produced by the Gagnon and Belzile or their allies or in connection with their families, for the benefit of the members of the association;
- Publish a magazine specific to the Gagnon and Belzile families, disseminate news and information in general about the association and its members.

## Member Benefits

- You receive "La Gagnonnière" magazine in paper format by mail and/or you have access to it in digital format on this site. It is published four times a year and includes news from the association and chapters, as well as articles on the history and genealogy of Gagnon and Belzile, past and present. Several of these articles are also published in French.
- You have privileged access to often unpublished documents and more detailed information that will make you discover your origins; as well as to a genealogical database specific to the Gagnon and Belzile, soon available to members on this site that will allow you to make your family tree.
- You will be informed of regional and national activities, including news and discoveries, conferences on history and genealogy, fairs or activities where you can meet us.
- You will be invited to our annual gatherings, you will have the right to vote and submit your candidacy for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the association's members, as well as that of your chapter.
- You will have the opportunity to twin with members of the "Gagnon de France" association: exchange of magazines, accommodation facilities, etc.
- You will be informed about our "Back to the Backgrounds" trips to France, as well as the Gagnon and Belzile tourist tours in Quebec and Ontario.

# ARMOIRIES

## Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc.

The coat of arms in the form of a coat of arms appeared in the 13th century on the combatants' shields to identify them with their allegiance and their family.

The elements constituting a coat of arms are the shield or the body of the shield, the enamels representing the colours (metals, colours and furs) and the furniture (all pieces appearing on the shield).

Opposite, the coat of arms representing the coat of arms of the association Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc.

The choice of dividing the shield field into four parts allows the four chosen elements to be placed in it. The number 4 is very symbolic: it recalls the four cardinal points, the four seasons, the four phases of the moon, the four arms of the cross and the four letters of the word "God" (Dieu in French).

The four elements, "furniture", have the following meaning:

- The dove and its olive branch represent the family and are symbols of peace;
- The fleur de lys is a reminder of France, the land of the Gagnon and Belzile ancestors; it symbolizes the French civilization, its language and culture that permeates our families;
- The star, guide and light, is the symbol of the intrepid faith and courage of the ancestors;
- The maple leaf symbolizes Canada, the adopted country of our ancestors; it is an image of the spiritual and material wealth of both families.

As for enamels, we find silver: a symbol of purity, light and fidelity.

In the case of colours, red, known as "de gueule", recalls the colour of fire and blood and is a symbol of life, strength and courage: virtues dear to the Gagnon and Belzile families. Blue, known as "azure", the colour of the sky, symbolizes peace, silence and the ideal of life.

The motto is "Peace, loyalty and love", so that "peace" shines forth in and around all family members; that all develop a sense of "loyalty" to their ancestors and the country where they live; and that "love" includes love of truth, life, beauty, as well as love and fidelity to God, to one's family and to the country!

*The current coat of arms was developed in 1988 by Father Lucien Godbout, heraldist, replacing the 350th anniversary in 1985, to which the name Belzile had been added, to the 300th anniversary in 1940 and whose author is unknown.*

*This information was extracted and adapted from the book "Gagnon et Belzile" by Brother Armand Gagnon, e.c. and published on behalf of the association Les familles Gagnon et Belzile inc. in 1995, reprinted in 2015. As well as from other sources.*



350th coat of arms

## STATISTICS ON GAGNON

The Gagnon represent one of the most prolific families in Quebec. During the last statistics recorded in 2005 on surnames, **the surname Gagnon appears to be the second largest family, known as the founding family, in Quebec** with 59,800 individuals, after the Tremblays with 81,500 and before the Roy with 57,000. If we add the Belzile, a branch of the ancestor Robert Gagnon, which numbered about 2,271 individuals; and the Gagnon in the rest of Canada, which is estimated at 8,000 people, as well as those living in the United States, which is estimated at 20,000, the **Gagnon would be the 1st most numerous family in North America** (Canada and the United States), with nearly 100,000 individuals bearing the name Gagnon and Belzile.

According to the 2006 report of the Institut de la statistique du Québec: before 1800, the Gagnon already ranked 3rd (0.59%) in Quebec, slightly ahead of the Gauthier in 2nd place (0.59%) and the Roy in 1st place (0.78%). Then in 1881, we moved to second place, almost on a par with the Roy's who were still in first place, each representing 0.7% of the population, followed by the Tremblay (0.66%) and Côtés (0.64%). But then we were still ahead of the Tremblays, who had nevertheless moved from 19th to 3rd place, and then rose to 1st place (1.08%) towards the end of the 20th century, while we remained good 2nd (0.79%), followed by the Roy (0.75%) and the Côté (0.69%).

It should be mentioned that the Gagnon descendants are from 4 ancestors, unlike the Tremblay which are from only one (Pierre). However, we have lost some of our descendants, a branch of the ancestor Robert, whose name Gagnon has been changed to Belzile. And the Gagnon, like the Tremblays, lost descendants with the phenomenon of compound names whose initial surnames fell during the transition to a simple name. The Tremblays are also more concentrated in Quebec and certain regions, while the Gagnon have spread more widely in the regions of Quebec, Canada and the United States. Tremblays are also less present in France, with 10,000 individuals, compared to the 2,000 Gagnon individuals; although this is very few compared to the 60,000 Gagnon in Quebec.

This swarming can be seen in the regional establishment of the main family names, with Gagnon being the only one present in the top 10 names in more than half of the RCMs (59/102). It is therefore the most widely used name geographically, while the names Roy (51/102), Côté (50/102) and even Tremblay, the first name in Quebec (45/102), follow with half or just under half of the RCMs.

In fact, there are only 19 names in the top 10 list at least 10 times, leaving plenty of room for regional variations. The large number of names that rank first and the low regional presence show that there is great diversity between regions in the distribution of names as well as a



high concentration of names in the regions. For example, in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the main concentration of Tremblay, Gagnon and Bouchard is among the top five names, representing only 4% of the population of Quebec, or 30%, 14% and 24% respectively of their namesakes. While it is in Montérégie that we find the most Roy and Côté, with proportions of 20% and 16% of the population of Quebec respectively.

Here is the distribution where the name Gagnon appears in the administrative regions of Quebec in a proportion of more than 10%: Saguenay/Lac-Saint-Jean (14.4%), Montérégie (13.6%), Quebec City (11.9%) and Montreal (11.4%); these 4 regions alone accounting for 51.3% of Gagnon living in Quebec.

<http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/population-demographie/caracteristiques/noms-famille-analyse.pdf>