

Claudine (Serre) Porte (1870-1946)

Submitted by her grandson and
grand daughter-in-law,
Francois and Eveline Porte

Claudine was born on March 3, 1870 at Haute Rivoire, France, the daughter of Jean-Baptiste and Claudine Serre (nee Boichon).

On October 15, 1893 Claudine married Jean-Marie Porte at the Catholic Church in Haute Rivoire. Two years later on August 15, 1895 in Courzieux, France, their only child Jean-Claude was born.



Claudine and Jean-Marie raised cattle and goats, seeded wheat, oats, and buckwheat. They also had fruit trees and grape vines. Jean-Marie would drive his horse and wagon to the market during the fruit season. He and some of their neighbours would leave home around 3 a.m. to sell fruit at the market. Jean-Marie and Claudine realized that it was impossible to acquire more land as none was available and, as the years went by, they heard a lot of people were immigrating to Canada.

Early in 1908, they sold all their belongings and rented out the farm. That spring Jean-Marie and Claudine with their twelve year old son, Jean-Claude, left France and boarded the ship named "Corinthian" at the Port of Le Harve, France.

It took fifteen days to cross the Atlantic Ocean. They entered Canada at the Port of Quebec City. From there they traveled by train to Winnipeg, Manitoba. The trip took three days and nights. They stayed eight days in Winnipeg. From there they traveled by train to Wauchope, Saskatchewan, where their future employer, Mr. Picot, met them with a team of horses and wagon to take them to Dumas and the land he owned north of Moose Mountain.

The first months they slept in a tent. On June 12th of that year there was a very heavy frost. The family nearly froze in the tent. If they had not signed a four year contract with Mr. Picot, their son Jean-Claude told his descendent, they would have returned to France. During the first summer Jean-Marie, Claudine, and Jean-Claude worked on Mr. Picot's ranch where he raised many horses which had to be broken and then sold to farmers.

The winter of 1908-09 was their first experience with a Canadian winter. The family believed it was the end of the world. They had never seen that much snow or temperatures as low as -20°C to -45°C before. During that summer their son Jean-Claude started school as there were no classes in the winter. He soon learned to speak English.

In the spring of 1910, Jean-Marie took a train to Weyburn to look for a homestead.

There he met a Frenchman, Ernest Rabin, who farmed in the Ceylon municipality. He told Jean-Marie land was available near his farm. Jean-Marie applied for a homestead next to the Rabin farm. In April of 1911, Jean-Marie was preparing to leave for his new homestead to build a house and break some land. He had the misfortune of being kicked by a horse and the result was broken ribs which caused pneumonia. Jean-Marie passed away on April 24, 1911. He was buried in the Dumas cemetery.

His poor wife Claudine and their fifteen year old son were devastated. They were in a new country, unable to speak English, with no money to return to their home country and family.

Claudine continued to work for Mr. Picot on the ranch as a cook and cleaning lady. Her son Jean-Claude looked after the horses.

That summer she received a letter from the Canadian government stating that she had lost title to the land her husband had previously applied for because he died before he could break any land. That same year a bachelor by the name of Alexandre Cotbreil in the Souris Valley area south east of Radville wrote them a letter offering employment for Claudine and Jean-Claude. He offered them superior wages to what they were earning at Mr. Picot's. She accepted the offer, arriving there on April 12, 1912.

They worked on his farm for two years. The first year Claudine took advantage of the close proximity to the land her husband had previously chosen. Claudine and her son traveled twenty miles or more to see it. While on that trip, Claudine decided to apply for the S.W. 23-4-19 on July 30 and did so on October 12 in the Ceylon municipality. Claudine had to have a lot of courage and faith to start farming from scratch alone with a young son. She was very busy at Alexandre's farm as she was often called on by the neighbouring women to lend them a hand or to help prepare meals during threshing season.

In 1913, her son borrowed a team of horses to break some virgin soil on his mother's land. She went along to do the cooking. That year she also applied for another quarter, the N.W. of 13-4-19 on June 10. In 1914, Claudine and Jean-Claude moved to her new land where they built a 14'x14' house on the N.W. of 13-4-19. The house was built to government regulation, heated with coal that came from a coal mine near Gladmar, Saskatchewan, some ten miles south of the farm. Victor Dumas and Ernest Rabin hauled the coal for them. Claudine also hired Victor Dumas to break ten acres of land for her.

Then in 1914 came the declaration of World War I. During that winter Ernest Rabin enlisted, leaving his wife and a young family at home. He hired Jean-Claude to feed his cattle for \$15.00 per month. In 1915, when Jean-Claude turned twenty, he continued to work for Ernest Rabin for \$40.00 per month plus helping his mother put in the crop on her land. One cannot imagine the hardship Claudine went through without her husband during the lonely, long winter days.

In 1916, Jean-Claude turned twenty-one, and qualified to purchase a homestead of

his own. He chose the S.W. 24-4-19, on July 25, next to his mother's land. They moved the house to this new location as water was plentiful on that quarter. That same year on August 3, 1916 Claudine was united in marriage to Alexandre Cotbreil in the Radville Holy Family Catholic Church.

Alexandre was born on September 15, 1873 on a farm near Lanthenac, France. He was the son of Louis-Marie Cotbreil and Marie Mathurine Guillozo. He had immigrated to Canada in early 1905. He had a homestead south east of Radville.

After their marriage, Alexandre moved all of his farming equipment to Jean-Claude's quarter and rented out his own land in the Radville municipality. Alexandre and Jean-Claude built a barn for the horses and the cows as well as a chicken coop. They farmed together for the next twelve years.

During those twelve years, Claudine, Alexandre, and Jean-Claude were busy improving the land and putting up new buildings. Like all the other homesteaders, they had to deal with dust storms, grasshoppers, rust in the crops, and frost. In late 1925 Alexandre returned to France to purchase land in Bourgueil for their retirement. He rented out the land before returning to Canada early in 1926. On his return trip, he was accompanied by his brother, Aime, and their twenty-seven year old niece, Philomene Cotbreil, for a visit to Canada. Aime returned to France as planned, but Philomene decided to stay longer.

In March 1927 Alexandre bought more land, the N.W. 9-5-16, in the Radville R.M. That same year he sold his homestead.

On July 23, 1928, at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Radville, Jean-Claude Porte was united in marriage to Philomene Cotbreil. Her visit to Canada became a lifetime. That same year, Jean-Claude purchased his mother's land and part of his step father's equipment. In 1929, Alexandre sailed alone to France for a couple of months to attend to his farm business.

In 1930, Alexandre and Claudine built themselves a new home in Radville. In 1934, they both sailed back to France for a couple of months to visit their relatives. This was the first visit for Claudine since she and her first husband had immigrated in 1908.

Late in 1937, Alexandre returned alone to France to attend to business concerning his land that was rented. During that trip Alexandre became ill and was unable to return to Canada to be with his wife Claudine. He was hospitalized and later died of pneumonia on May 4, 1938 in Bourgueil, France, where he was buried.

Claudine continued to live in their home in Radville until illness forced her to move to the farm with her son and daughter-in-law in the spring of 1946. Claudine died at her son's home on June 6, 1946. She is buried in the St. Colette's cemetery, a country church about two and a half miles north of the Porte farm.

The following year in 1947 her son Jean-Claude sold his step-father Alexandre's last quarter of land in the Radville R.M.

In 1956 Jean-Claude and Philomene sailed to France to visit relatives. At that time during their stay in France, Jean-Claude sold his parents' (Claudine and Jean-Marie Porte) farm that had been rented out in 1908.