

## BEYOND BUSINESS: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND FRENCH THROUGH THE ARCHIVES OF THE DOUGLAS FAMILY, AN OVERVIEW

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Jody Robinson, Archivist  
*Bishop's University*

### Abstract

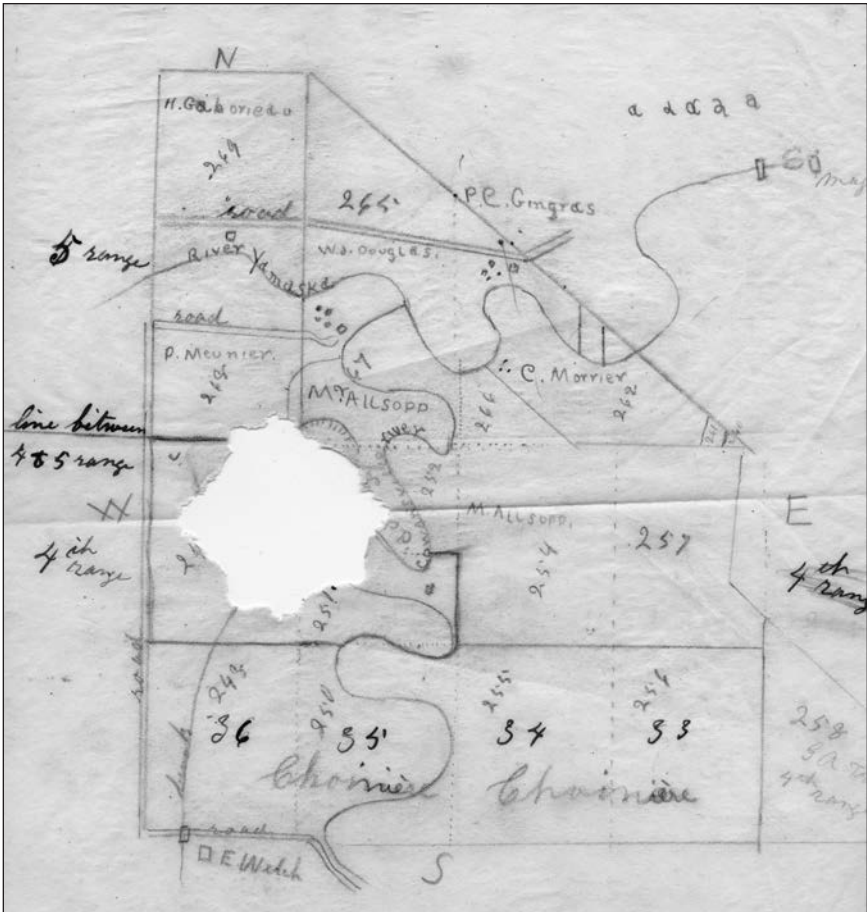
This article provides a perspective on language relations between Anglophones and Francophones in Missisquoi County, in the Eastern Townships, at the turn of the twentieth century. It uses archival documents from the Douglas family to look at the experience of Anglophones living in an area with a significant Francophone population. The documents suggest that this geographical proximity led to the formation of not only business relationships but also personal relationships between the two groups.

### Résumé

*Cet article offre une perspective sur les relations linguistiques entre les anglophones et les francophones du comté de Missisquoi, dans les Cantons-de-l'Est, au tournant du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'analyse de documents d'archives de la famille Douglas permet d'observer l'expérience d'anglophones vivant dans une région avec une population francophone importante. Les documents suggèrent que cette proximité géographique a conduit à la formation non seulement de relations d'affaires, mais aussi de liens personnels entre les deux groupes.*

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**B**orn in 1854 in Farnham Township, William James Douglas was a first-generation Canadian. His parents, James Douglas and Janet Kirkpatrick, along with his older siblings, emigrated from Mouswald, Scotland in the early 1850s. After their arrival in Canada, the Douglasses began their new life, settling as farmers in Farnham. While on the surface this story is not unlike many other nineteenth-century immigrants to the Eastern Townships, the documents left by William and his family provide an interesting perspective on language relations



Sketch of the properties around the Douglas farm, by William Douglas  
(ETRC, P185/001.08.004)

in late nineteenth-century Farnham. Their correspondence and other documents show evidence of an interaction with the French-Canadian community that went beyond the business relationships that often defined the relationships between Anglophones and Francophones in this time period. The following is an overview of the documents in the Douglas-Bridgette family fonds (P185) which attest to the interactions of William Douglas' family with their Francophone neighbours.

Unlike portions of the southern and central sections of the Eastern Townships where the population was predominantly English up to the turn of the twentieth century, Missisquoi County, which included West Farnham, had a comparatively large and prominent French population by the late-1800s. In a history of the Eastern Townships, Jean-Pierre

Kesteman reported that West Farnham had a population composed of at least 60 percent French-Canadians in 1881.<sup>1</sup> The territory covered by Farnham Township butted right up against two seigneuries: the Seigneurie of St. Hyacinthe and the Seigneurie of Monnoir.<sup>2</sup> As the populations of the seigneuries along the western borders of the Eastern Townships grew, French-Canadians spilled over into the townships, settling in the areas of Farnham and Stanbridge Townships, as well as Shefford, Bagot and Drummond Counties. The Douglas farm, situated at the boundary of West Farnham, was literally a stone's throw away from a long-established Francophone population. The composition of the Douglas' immediate neighbours is further illustrated by a sketch – found among the family's papers – of the land in the vicinity of the Douglas property, dated from around 1890. All but one of William Douglas' neighbours bore a French surname. These names included C. Morrier, H. Gaboriau, P. Meunier, P.C. Gingras, and the one other English family, M. Allsopp.<sup>3</sup>

Notably found among William's personal correspondence are two letters from Hector Gaboriau, which are written in French.<sup>4</sup> On the 1881 Canadian Census, Hector Gaboriau and his family are listed as neighbours to the Douglasses, and the 1892 *Eastern Townships Business and Farmers Directory* lists William and Hector owning adjacent lots in Farnham Township.<sup>5</sup> Although there was over a decade difference in their ages, the two men would have known each other from spending years as neighbours. It appears that the Gaboriau family moved to the United States, mostly likely in pursuit of better opportunities, and the two letters were written during their time in Rhode Island.

493 Broad St.  
Central Falls, R.I. 9/30/1896

Cher Ami,

Comme il y a déjà quelque temps que je n'ai pas reçu de vos nouvelles je t'écris quelques lignes pour t'informer que ma santé est assez bonne et mes enfants aussi sont bien portants et nous espérons que vous fouissiez du même bien fait. Depuis quelques semaines ma femme est malade. Je n'ai rien de nouveau à t'apprendre seulement que le temps est dur. Je travaille que 4 jours par semaine et Arthur est souvent des semaines sans travailler; cependant on vit bien quant même. On nous dit que vous avez le temps dur vous aussi qu'est-ce que fait donc votre homme (Laurier) est-ce vrai que l'avoine ne vaut que 16 cents le minot et les patates 18 cts.

Il faudra que Mr. Bonneville arrange ses flutes pour me payer le loyer au temps juste. Je t'en préviens d'avance il me faudra toute la somme, tu paieras les taxes d'école et conseil quand tu auras l'argent.

Rien de plus que les amitiés de toute la famille et de moi-même.

Ton ami dévoué,  
Hector Gaboriau

Quand il te plaira de m'écrire on te lira avec plaisir.  
Good-bye.<sup>6</sup>

493 Broad St. C.F., R.I. [Dec. 1899?]

Mr. Douglas

Mon cher Ami,

Pardonne moi si j'ai retardé de quelques jours à répondre à ton aimable et intéressante lettre. C'est toujours un grand plaisir pour les enfants comme pour nous de recevoir de vos nouvelles nous voyons que l'ouvrage ne manque pas chez vous ayant à faire le beurre par ici nous payons le bon beurre en tnette 20 cts la livre, mais le fromage est assez cher, 14 cts les patates 40 cts a 50 cts le [minas?]. Il fait très chaud depuis 3 semaines nous n'avons pas de pluie bien qu'il y ait souvent apparence. Je ne pense pas à vendre ma terre, mais si tu trouves un acheteur qui donnera \$5000 dollars, je ne la vendrai pas à moins. Mais à Pierre Meunier je ne la vendrais pas pour aucun prix, de sorte que tu peux te consoler je n'ai jamais dit que j'irais à l'automne, et je considère trop mon voisin Douglas, pour avoir l'idée de faire des marches avec Meunier car il est vraiment malheureux d'avoir cette famille la pour voisin, je plains cette pauvre Mrs Marchessau, ils vont prendre les moyens de la flatter pour lui en arracher autant qu'ils le pourront. Bien cher [Willy?], je ne me rappelle pas si je suis obligé de fournir les [clous?] je veux lui donner ce que le bail lui donne pas plus, et je pense qu'il doit être un homme raisonnable en tout. Il est [probable?] que les Meunier doivent l'enciter autant que leur malice la permet contre moi, ils peuvent en profiter d'y aller, car si jamais je retourne je les tiendrai à une bonne distance. Nous somme tous bien et vous souhaitons le même bienfait et du bon temps pour les foins. Arthur ne travaille pas de ce temps ci sa filature est arrêtée pour 2 semaines. Nous te remercions pour toutes les nouvelles que tu donnes. Recevez tous nos

respectueux saluts. Je trouve que Bonneville a eu assez de bardeau. Je ne veux pas faire de couvertures neuves.

Mes remerciements,  
H. Gaboriau<sup>7</sup>

From the information found among William's papers, it appears that Hector had significant amount of trust in him. On 24 April 1899, William, acting as Hector's representative, leased the Gaboriau farm to a Mr. LaBreque for the period of one year.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there is no other information on the Gaboriau family among the Douglas documents and they do not give us an idea if they stayed in the United States or if they eventually moved back to Canada. However, not long after this correspondence, in 1903, William Douglas sold his own farm in Farnham and moved to Waterloo. No longer being neighbours, it would have been easy for the two families to have fallen out of touch with each other.

Among William's papers is another letter, written in French, from Frédéric Benoit and his family. Similar to the Gaboriau family, it appears that the Benoit family also went searching for work in United States.

Whitinsville Mass 15 Decembre 1891

Cher ami

Je vous écri quelle que mot pour vous lessé a savoir de nouvelle qui sont très bon. Je soite que la presence de cette lette vous trouve aussi bien quelle nous lesse et bien tu me dira si lé gen de la [*word illegible*] si on bien louer de terre et aussi si vous avez [été?] et tu me denere de nouvelle du Canada et moi je vas te parlez de parreci et pour vous au on a pas vue de marchan on a pri gage [toutesuis?] mes on est quatre qui travaille et moi, Frédéric, je travaille sur la ferme je fait toute sorte douvrage et ge gangne \$1 25 cts par jour et lé enfant pour commencer il gangne pas encore en gros [païy?] et est nos quatre on rapa \$12 par cemaine et on amen toute lé [sêmeinne?] je pense si on a pas marchan on va ferre notre afer et on s'est pas encore ennuier et moi, Saraphine, j'ai a vous die madame [haier?] que je sui pas apres tirée lé vache et ferre le beurre. Je vous assur que j'ai un autre ouvrage que sela et je me trouve pas trop mail et lé enfant, il vont a lécole anglaise. Théodore et Matilda, elle ma die ge la compren pas cette mètése la et Hosana elle étant parlez englas elle repet par [*word illegible*] allos gager et

on trouve sela dro et je vas vous parlez dû temps de parreci il fait bien bau con dans lété et lé enfant il aime bien leur ouvrage et joseph et moi je vas allez a lécole du soir au mois genvier et tu me parra du farmier de [*word illegible*]. Rien de plus pour le présen que dé respec a toute la famielle et tu en brasera lé peti enfant pour nous nouveau et nous soitant une heureuse annez et nous somme pour la vie vos amie dévez.

Saraphine Adams et  
 Frédéric Benoit

Adieu et aurevoir une response aupluto si sela vous fait plaisir. Vous adresseré votre lettre comme sesi Whitinsville Mass<sup>9</sup>

Similar to Gaboriau, other sources indicate that Frédéric Benoit grew up a neighbour to the Douglasses. According to the 1892 *Business and Farmers Directory*, Magloire Benoit, Frédéric's father, is listed as owning a farm on a lot adjacent to that of the Douglasses.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, William's journal entries from 1886 to 1894 make a number of references to the "Bennoits," as he spelled it early on. In 1887, William wrote that he visited the family shortly before he attended the funeral of William Benoit, Frédéric's younger brother.<sup>11</sup> In the autumn of 1891, William attended Fred Benoit's auction and his entries also suggest that Fred visited the Douglasses just before leaving for the United States.<sup>12</sup> From the information in William's journals, it appears that the letter quoted above was written just a month after the Benois left Quebec. The final mention of Fred comes in 1894 when William's entry for June 15 reads "Fred Benoit died."<sup>13</sup>

Although there is no additional correspondence among the documents left by William Douglas that give details of further relationships with his Francophone neighbours, his personal diary entries indicate their interactions. Some of the references William makes to French family names are in the context of hiring them for work on the farm but others suggest a more familiar relationship. There are many mentions of visits to and from French names, such as Paquette and Gingras, as well as William's entries stating that he attended events such as the Menard's and Gingras' "raisings" and the Benoit's and Denicourt's "beas".<sup>14</sup> While the diary entries lack more detail, they likely refer to barn raising, which historically were social activities and promoted community relationships. The fact that William, and likely the Douglas family, attended these events for his Francophone neighbours suggests that there was a sense of community support among them.

Included among the Douglas-Bridgette family fonds is some evidence of further social interactions that other members of the Douglas family had with the Francophones in the community around them. For example, an obituary for Anna, William's second oldest daughter, states she attended a French school when she was young, before attending the Farnham Model School.<sup>15</sup> While no documents give an indication of where the other Douglas children attended school prior to the Model School, it is likely that at least Janet, being older than Anna, would have also attended French school for a short time in the early years of her education. While not unheard of, Protestants attending a Catholic school was an uncommon occurrence at the end of the nineteenth century and suggests that there may not have been an English schoolhouse located near enough to the Douglas farm for the children to be able to attend. It is also worth noting that Anna went on to be one of the first teachers in the province to receive her French Specialist Certificate and taught French in high schools in various regions.<sup>16</sup>

A letter, written in French by Cedric to his sister, Janet (a.k.a. Jennie), in 1906 also demonstrates the overall comfort William's children had in the French language. Cedric, who was almost 16 at the time, alludes to Janet's husband's inferior knowledge of French, even making a joke of it.

'Eilerslie'

Waterloo, Oct. 7ième/06

Ma chère Jennie:-

Maman dit qu'il me faut vous écrire une lettre. Maintenant, je ne sais rien ni de nouvelle ni de vieux mais je dois vous dire que les autres de la famille sont tous bien mais je ne suis pas capable de mettre mes souliers encore à cause de mon ardeuil. Mon grandpère est un peu mieux. Docteur ne pense pas qu'il a cassé sa jambe parce-qu'il est si bien si tôt.

Hier mon père et moi sont allés chez mon grandpère pour ramasser des pommes. Il y en a beaucoup de pommes de toutes sortes cette année.

Mon père est couché contre la poêle tirant la queue de la chatte.

Lui et moi avons pris une promenade à/en voiture chez Monsieur Heatherington. James va à Detroit chemin pour se faire mécanique.

Maman et moi sont allés à Cowansville Jeudi. Nous sommes y allés pour faire une visite, pendant que je n'étais

pas capable d'aller à l'école. Nous avons vu mon oncle Robert, ma tante Louie et mon cousin David. Ils son tous bien excepter la rheum pour oncle Robert. Aussi nous avons vu Archie Grant et sa famille, qui sont tous bien et nous sommes retournés vendredi soir.

J'oubliai de dire que j'ai reçu ta lettre aujourd'hui.

Demandez Arthur s'il est capable de lire mon écriture. S'il dit Oui engagez cinquante cents avec lui qu'il n'est pas capable de lire la moitié et racontez-moi ce qu'il dit quand vous le lui montrerez.

J'ai écrit en français parque je ne sais rien d'autre chose depuis que je suis allé à une école avec un maître français comme M. Rivard.

Je suis votre frère, autant qu'auparavant.

C.S. Douglas<sup>17</sup>

The final few sentences of Cedric's letter suggest that, at his young age, he felt the knowledge of French was indispensable and that his brother-in-law's inability to even read the language was inadequate. It is also possible that Cedric's attitude indicated a sense among the more affluent Anglophone townshippers that knowledge of French was a symbol of proper education.<sup>18</sup> The letter also suggests that Janet, too, was fluent in French. Furthermore, a 1901 letter Janet wrote to her father describing her activities included her visit to a French Presbyterian church service, which she attended with some friends.<sup>19</sup>

While the above represents a brief overview of some of the documents left by the Douglas family, they are significant because they represent a level of interaction between the English- and French-speaking communities in the Eastern Townships that is not often seen in archival records of the times. The personal correspondence to William from Hector Gaboriau and Frédéric Benoit along with William's diary entries demonstrate some level of friendship, rather than a simple business relationship, which is more typically seen among the documents at the ETRC. The activities, education and letters of the Douglas children suggest that they were raised in an environment where the acquisition of French was a natural, or at least necessary, part of life. Again, this is not a characteristic evident in many other family documents in the archives. For this reason, a more detailed study of the Douglas-Bridgette family fonds and a search for others like them might yield some interesting information on the dynamics of the interactions between the Anglophone and Francophone communities in the Eastern Townships in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



## NOTES

1. Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam and Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons-de-l'Est*, (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1998), p. 245–9.
2. British American Land Company, Map of the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada, 1842, (ETRC P996/096/014/001).
3. Hand-drawn map of a portion of Farnham Township, ca. 1890 (ETRC, P185/001.08/004).
4. The letters that have been transcribed in this article have been transcribed with all original errors and punctuation. This has been done to give readers an accurate representation of the quality of the authors' written French.
5. William Douglas owned a farm on Range 5, Lot 35, and Hector Gaboriau was located on Range 5, Lot 36, of Farnham Township (*Eastern Townships Business and Farmer's Directory, 1892*, Toronto: Might's Directory Co., 1892, 220, and Census of Canada, 1881, District 65 (Missisquoi), Subdistrict J (Farnham), Division 1, p. 23).
6. Hector Gaboriau to William J. Douglas, 30 September 1896 (ETRC, P185/001.08/006).
7. Hector Gaboriau to William J. Douglas, ca. 1899 (ETRC, P185/001.08/006).
8. Lease agreement, Hector Gaboriau to Mr. LaBreque, 24 April 1899 (ETRC, P185/001.08/004).
9. Frédéric Benoit to William J. Douglas, 15 December 1891 (ETRC, P185/001.08/006).
10. William Douglas owned a farm on Range 5, Lot 35, and Magloire Benoit was located on Range 5, Lot 34, of Farnham Township (*Eastern Townships Business and Farmer's Directory, 1892*, Toronto: Might's Directory Co., 1892, 219–220).
11. William Douglas, personal journals, 1886–1894 (ETRC, P185/001.08/002) and Census of Canada, 1881, District 63 (Rouville), Subdistrict J (L'Ange-Gardien), p. 70.
12. William Douglas, personal journals, November 1891 (ETRC, P185/001.08/002).
13. William Douglas, personal journals, June 1894 (ETRC, P185/001.08/002).
14. William Douglas, personal journals, April 1885, April–November 1891, September 1900 (ETRC, P185/001.08/002). Unfortunately, William does not give more specific information on what kind of 'raising' and 'bea'.
15. Anna Douglas Moynan obituary, June 1961 (ETRC, P185/001.12/001).

16. Anna Douglas Moynan obituary, June 1961 (ETRC, P185/001.12/001).
17. Cedric Douglas to Janet Douglas Mellor, 7 October 1906 (ETRC, P185/001.15/010).
18. In the 1938 *Report of the Quebec Protestant Education Survey*, it was clearly indicated that learning French was a necessary part of English-Protestant education and, in a survey circulated to businesses, found that knowledge of French was imperative for access to the best employment opportunities in the province (Quebec Protestant Education Survey, *Report of the Quebec Protestant Education Survey*, (Montreal: s.n., 1938, p. 149–55).
19. Janet Douglas to William Douglas, 1901 (ETRC, P185/001.11/007).