

## ST. CONSTANT

### BIRTHPLACE OF ARMAND LABERGE (VIII)

St. Constant, Province of Quebec, Canada was in 1859 the birthplace of my grandfather Armand (Pierre Samuel Antoine) Laberge. St. Constant at the time of Grandfather LaBerge's birth was a small but thriving farming community located a few kilometers below the south bank of the St Lawrence river, just south of Montreal and about ten kilometers east of Chateauguay.

The town's somewhat tenuous existence in those days is described in a rather long chronicle, unfortunately all in French, included in this collection. From an area long used by trappers, the town grew in the early 1800 with the expansion of French Canadian farming into the southern St Lawrence valley, protected from Indians and Americans by a series of forts along the Richelieu river, most notably the one at Chambly nearby.

Difficult climate and paying out of the soil in the area caused a mass migration of most of its residents to the United States in the late 1860's and '70s. With the advent of crop rotation and new fertilization techniques, the land is again productive and the town of St. Constant again thrives. In addition to agriculture, St. Constant on its northern edge has become a bedroom community for an ever growing Montreal nearby. The older part still shows some vestige of the era when Armand was born.

However, the building which was both family store and home of Armand and his father and mother, Pierre and Hedwige, no longer exist, but according to Fr. Roome was located on the north side of the main street of the old section, just beyond the railroad crossing.

As will be described in more detail in other sections of this compendium, Pierre Laberge had been a prominent merchant and one time mayor of Chateauguay. He had married Falicite Doumachel at Chateauguay in 1846 and there had with her four children. Falicite died in 1857 and Pierre remarried at St. Constant in 1858, Hedwige Lewis who was then living in St. Constant with her brother, Samuel John Lewis, a prominent notary and council member. The Lewis family was well to do at that time as was that of Pierre.

When the new family, father, mother, Armand, Mary, Rosa, and Virgie, moved to the US is not clear. However, it had to be somewhat after the birth of Virgie in St. Constant in 1867 and the first US recorded appearance of the family in St. Joseph, Missouri in 1873.