

Depocas dit Joannis in Bytown

The Depocas dit Joannis families who settled in Bytown were originally from Cote St. Pierre in St. Benoit parish, Deux Montagnes Seigneurie. They represent one of many examples of French Canadian migration that occurred from the Deux Montagnes/St. Eustache area to Bytown/Outaouais in the mid-1800s, occasioned by better work opportunities and the availability of non-seigneurial lands for them and their families.

Jean Baptiste Depocas dit Joannis (1770-1832), a third generation French Canadian, was a labourer/farmer. He and his wife Marie Claire Robert had 9 children, all of whom reached adulthood. They lived on the King's Road in St. Martin village, Ile Jesus, until about 1804, after which they moved about 25km northwest to Cote Saint Henri South concession in Riviere du Chene Seigneurie (west of Blainville). A few years later, they moved again, this time about 15km west to Cote St. Pierre South concession in St. Benoit parish. This concession is in the north west part of Deux Montagnes and later became part of St. Hermas parish. Jean Baptiste's land was most likely his father Louis' homestead. Louis died in 1817.

Four of Jean Baptiste's sons moved to Bytown. Three others relocated to Outaouais.

The first was Vincent and wife Josephte Labelle and their four children, who left St. Andre Est about 1839 and resettled in Bytown. Six more children were born in Bytown in the 1840-1851 period. The 1842 census for Nepean shows him as "Vanson Jwanish", a labourer with a family of 7 members. He was most likely a sawmill worker, which is thought to have been his occupation in St. Andre. The 1847 map of the Dow's Lake area from Elliott's History of Nepean, shows a Joannisse family occupying land approximately situated between Queen Elizabeth Drive, Lakeview Terrace and Lakeside Avenue in today's Ottawa. Elliott says this was Vincent's family.

At that time this area was part of Ordnance lands stretching to Hog's Back, and not available for sale. It had been occupied by Irish colonists after completion of the Rideau Canal. Gradually, French Canadian settlers replaced the Irish on lands now occupied by Carleton University. They would remain, despite government attempts to have them evicted, until 1870 when the lands were sold.

About 1840, Vincent's two eldest brothers, Jean Baptiste and Francois, relocated to Bytown. Jean Baptiste, spouse Adelaide Roy and 7 children, came from St. Benoit. Francois, wife Josephte Blais and their large family moved from Rigaud. Both brothers had previously lived in St. Andre and Rigaud. In 1831, Jean Baptiste a carpenter, and Francois a charron (cartwright/wheelwright), were neighbours in the Fourche concession on what is now called the Rigaud River, a little west of Rigaud. In the 1842 Nepean census, Jean Baptiste (listed as Jwanish) is a labourer, probably at a sawmill, and Francois (Depocas) a blacksmith. It is unlikely they resided on Vincent's land, since all three census entries are separated in the records. More likely, the older brothers resided with other French Canadian settlers on Ordnance lands.

Brother Louis (my line) lived in Bytown a short while in 1845-1847. He and his second wife Marie-Ann Emarenger and six children had been living in St. Andre where Louis was a carpenter. During their brief residency in Bytown, another son was born and a son died at age 13.

Louis and Jean Baptiste were the first to leave Bytown, about 1848. Louis acquired 100 acres on the Ottawa River in Buckingham Township near today's Masson. Jean Baptiste settled on 200 acres in Range 2 Templeton Township. Their youngest brother Laurent, who was living in Ste. Scholastique, bought the 100 acres next to Louis. In the early 1850s, Vincent settled on 200 acres, two lots to the west of Louis and Laurent. These lands are now bisected by Route 148, Autoroute 50 and the CPR rail line. A few farms

remain in the area and the lands are partially occupied by rural residential housing on Rue Brabant. Ruisseau Joannis, a small creek, flows into the Ottawa on Vincent's property.

Francois died in Bytown in early 1852. Most of his surviving family members remained there. Another brother Isidore moved from St. Hermas to Angers in the 1850s and the seventh brother Joseph and family left St. Marthe in Vaudreuil Seigneurie and settled in Ste. Cecile de Masham.

The brothers had a total of 66 children, most of whom lived to adulthood in the Ottawa/Outaouais area. The name Depocas was dropped by the end of the 1800s and Joannis and Joanis are the common spellings used now by descendants.