

THE GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS:

A Provencal Love Story



Euphemia Provencal

It was 1819 that Pierre Provencal was determined to leave mercantile life, go into the country and try farming. He bought a large tract of land in, as the old deed says, "a place known and called Grosse Pointe on Lake St. Clair." The shores of the lake and Detroit River were then lined with the picturesque windmills of the French "habitants" and the air was full of their legends and superstitions. Pierre married Euphemia St. Aubin, the ceremony performed by the Rev. Fr. Gabriel Richard, on February 1, 1831.

The spot chosen for the home was practically in the forest. A section had to be cleared and a house built. Across the crude roadway, where Lakeshore Drive is now, the waves of Lake St. Clair swept and swirled and wilderness was all around. In 1869, the house still stood amid groves of maples, planted by Pierre Provencal himself, and everlasting pines which were part of nature's original offerings.

As time passed and their wealth increased, but with no children to brighten the little home, Pierre Provencal and his young wife conceived of a plan to spend their money usefully for the benefit of humanity. There was no church or school in the vicinity, but there were plenty of children in the surrounding country who needed care.

In the back of the house, Pierre Provencal erected another building, smaller but comfortable, furnished it, and started his charitable work. One by one, children were brought to the Provencal home. They were of varied ages, but all very young, one of them being only five days old. All were from Detroit and all were orphans who had lost their parents from the Cholera Plagues of 1832, '34 and



Pierre Provencal

1849. Late in life, Euphemia and Pierre were blessed with a daughter, Catherine.

Pierre Provencal maintained this orphan's home at his own expense. For many years it continued, and during its existence, no less than twenty-four orphaned children were raised on the old farm. As the children grew to an age when they should be educated, teachers were supplied and a school established in the home.

One of the remarkable results of this venture is the fact that every one of these twenty four children reached maturity and became a useful and respectable citizen in the vicinity. As they grew up, one by one, and left the old farm to go out into the world on their own, they were given by Pierre Provencal enough of his worldly goods to make a start in life.

There was no church or chapel for many miles around and the farm house was always open. In the east parlor, a confessional box and an altar were built, and services were held, confessions made and communion administered by a priest who came from Detroit each Sunday. On pleasant Sundays, so many people came to worship that the house could not hold them so they would kneel on the wide veranda to offer their prayers while hearing the swishing waters and the sighing pines. Everyone around knew of the open door at the Provencal farm and of the hospitality of its owner. When crops failed, and the winter was hard and bitter for the poorer farmers whose provisions ran low, the spacious granaries of the Provencal farm provided food which was distributed, so no one left empty handed.

Celebrate the special love in the Provencal Home.

*Based on a bibliography story by Pruella Jane Sherman, 1899
The Grosse Pointe Historical Society Archives*