

BAKING BREAD ON BOTH SIDES OF THE OCEAN

The story of the Everix family of Belgium and Wisconsin

My great-aunt Joanna Slaets, née Wuyts, had great news for the family in Antwerp, Belgium:

'...I think that we will have a marriage party this year as Marie from Uncle Vic has set her mind upon a Flemish boy...'

And on September 22, 1897, she was able to report:

'...Marie of Aunt Fien got married on August 28 and there was a great feast. Denis was best man...'

That 'Flemish boy' was Petrus Emillius Everix. He went by the name Emile and was born on March 14, 1872 in the hamlet Klapperhoeck, part of Beveren village in the province of East-Flanders, Belgium. His parents, Josef Everix and Maria Poppe, owned a bakery in Beveren where Emile learned the trade. He had twelve brothers and sisters and four of them went to the new world; Emile in 1893; his brother Gustaaf, with his wife Valeria De Beer, in 1898; his sister Maria Josephina and her husband Theophile De Waele in 1902 and his youngest sister Marguerite in 1909. Marguerite married Jules De Decker in Chicago, Illinois. We don't know for sure why Emile went to America. It could be that he, like many other young men, was trying to avoid compulsory service in the Belgian army...



The only jobs available to the new arrivals were lumberjacks and sawmill workers. Living in this modest log cabin Emile and his new bride dreamed of opening a bakery in Wausaukee.

Marie or Mary, baptized Anna Marie Debot, was the daughter of my great-granduncle Victor Debot and my great-grandaunt Sophie (called Fien) Peeters. She was born in Antwerp, Belgium November 5, 1872 and migrated, 14 years old, with her parents and her sisters Jepha (who later married Fons DeRoeck of Norway, MI) and Justine (who married John DeGroot of Wausaukee, WI) and her brothers Jeff (he married Catherine Bourdeau of Green Bay, WI) and Edmond (he married Julia DeRoeck of Norway, MI) to America. The family Debot departed from Antwerp on board the SS Nederland on March 21, 1887 and arrived in Philadelphia, PA on April 6. It is interesting to note that Philadelphia on the Delaware River, like Antwerp on the Scheldt, is one of the largest freshwater ports in the world and played a major role in the history of immigration. Soon after, the family arrived in a forestry camp called Mastodon in northwestern Michigan. Before they settled permanently in Wausaukee, Wisconsin, sometime in 1888, they also spent some time in Iron Mountain, Michigan.



Louis “Denis” Slaets, best man at the Everix Debot wedding, his wife Joanna and their children in front of their first house 1 Maple Street in Wausaukee.

Their ‘*best man*’ Louis (called Denis) Slaets and his wife Joanna (called Jeanette) Wuyts are my granduncle and grandaunt. Victor Debot had asked them to come to America, as his wife ‘*Fien would like another Flemish woman around here.*’ The Debots were even willing to advance the money for the voyage. It worked, as Louis and Joanna and their children Jacobus (called George – he married Lillian Lemere of Marinette, WI) and Maria (called Mary) left Antwerp by the SS Illinois and arrived in Philadelphia on June 18, 1892.

When Emile Everix and the Debot and Slaets families arrived in Wausaukee, it was still a pioneer settlement. Wausaukee, meaning ‘distant land’ in Native American, started with one log cabin in the middle of virgin forest in 1880. The original cabin became the first tavern and subsequently a blacksmith moved in. Eventually other businesses followed, including tailors, wagon makers, general stores, saloons, and inns. As the only jobs available in that region were as lumberjacks or laborers in the sawmills, the two families Debot and Slaets had no option but to live and work in lumber camps. Not only men, but also women and young children worked there, cooking, cleaning, and helping in the sawmills. On his first day of work, at 12 years of age, Mary’s younger brother Jeff almost sawed off his hand.

It was Emile's dream to start a bakery in Wausaukee but lacking the necessary capital he also started working as a laborer for the North Ludington Lumber Co. He must have been in very good physical shape, as he became a jobber or log driver. This was a very risky job and many of those who transported the logs by floating them downriver lost their lives after falling and being crushed. It was there he met his future wife Mary, a cook. They married in St. Augustine's church in Wausaukee on Saturday August 28, 1897. Jepha, the sister of the bride, was bridesmaid and her cousin Louis Slaets was best man. And as we can read in Joanna's letter, *'There was a great feast.'*

By the early 1900s, more and more land had been cleared and as the pine forest became depleted, farmers arrived and started working the land, which proved good for farming and stockbreeding. The landscape changed and the woodsmen had to find different jobs or move elsewhere. Louis and Victor became self-employed businessmen. Louis started the "*Louis Slaets Carpenter and Contractor Company*" and Victor held various positions in the lumber industry and entered politics as Wausaukee's town treasurer.



Bakery owner Emile Everix, now a prosperous man, with a party of family and friends in his Studebaker Coach in about 1925.

"The Freshest Thing in Town"

By 1910, Emile Everix found himself in a position to realize his dream of starting a bakery. He designed the building to suit his purposes, equipped it with all the necessary machinery and opened Wausaukee's first bakery shop that year. From these humble beginnings, a chain of Everix bakeries would spring in Wisconsin. Considering it a more promising location, Emile first bought the Gustav Buhl Bakery in Chilton in 1920. He sold the Wausaukee shop to Felix Wittcock and went on to remodel and modernize the bakery in Chilton.

Emile and Mary had six children: Victor Joseph, Richard Raymond, Alice Agnes, Frances April and Mark Peter. One of them, Marie, died in infancy. Three of their sons worked in the bakery. In 1935 Emile and his son Richard Sr. took over a bakery in Fond du Lac and at one time they owned a number of outlet stores in Fond du Lac and out of town in Oshkosh and Sheboygan. The bakery, although one of the most modern in the state of Wisconsin, was known for its old-fashioned way of baking, using high-quality ingredients and professional skill from start to finish. After Emile's death in 1943, the family business was operated by his son Mark Peter and his wife Muriel until 1978. Richard Raymond and his son Dick ran another Everix bakery in Fond du Lac. Dick's wife Ellen, the last owner, sold the bakery to Prescott Supermarkets in 1998.

Mary (Debot) Everix died, 92 years old, in Chilton, Wisconsin, in 1965.

One of Emile's grandsons, Richard Everix, Jr. wrote a specialized baker's book, the "*Richard Everix Formula Book*" with about 700 formulas the family accumulated during so many years.

Incidentally, the first known Everix ancestor of both the Belgian and American descendants was a foundling, left by the front door of one of the town halls in Paris, France in the latter part of the 18th century. The baby was given the name Everickx. His son, Pierre, would marry one Eleonore De Munck of Beveren, Belgium. And that was the beginning of many generations of Everix bakeries in Beveren, Belgium, and in Wisconsin, USA. Even today there is an Everix bakery in Beveren, run by Nico and Sandy Everix. As one of the Wisconsin Everix slogans went:

"Nothin' shows your lovin' like something from the oven."

Dominique Van Rentergem
Antwerp, Belgium



After years of hardship in logging camps, Emile Everix and his wife, Mary Debot, were able to realize the American Dream. They owned not just one bakery in Wisconsin, but a chain of them.