

Bredimus – Blum History

by

Harriette Bredimus

The Blum Family:

Henriette Blum Bredimus, my paternal grandmother, was born in Paris. Her father, was engaged in a type of diplomatic work under the title of “le secretaire des Affaires Royales” and had been secretary to the King of Italy before accepting the post of secretary to the Caliph in Cairo, Egypt.

Grandmother had three sisters and one brother, the latter Captain Maurice Blum of the French Army’s “les Chasseurs de Afrique”. During the time of the construction of the Suez Canal, when 'the French Government was forced to take over the completion of the project, Captain Blum served as Paymaster.

One of Grandmother's sisters married an Egyptian Bey, although Grandmother was always quick to inform one that he had only one wife. Another sister married a Greek composer and their country home was near Salonika, Greece. One of the operas which this composer wrote met with good acclaim and was called “Didon”. As far as I can learn, the third sister married and lived in the Normandy section of France. At the time of Grandmother's death a letter of condolence was written by this sister's daughter who was postmistress of that little village.

Grandmother and one of her sisters, and perhaps Maurice, were left in France when Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother Blum went to “le Caire”, Egypt. The reason for this was because of an eye disease prevalent among children there and foreign children under the age of sixteen were not brought into the country.

Grandmother and her sisters and brothers received a good education for that time and, when the family was all together in Egypt, the sisters conducted a private school in the French sector.

Grandmother told many interesting things about her life in Cairo when I would visit her. Among them remember her telling how the drinking water was always boiled due to the lack of purifying facilities, no doubt -and the water was kept in a large vase-like vessel left hanging in a cool part of the house. Also, much coffee was consumed and always served in small amount - more or less like demitasse - and it was their custom to drink as many as twenty-four cups during the day.

When the plague broke out in Cairo, Great Grandfather Blum sent his family back to France and, it was on the boat that Grandmother met Francois Bredimus.

The Bredimus Family:

Francois Bredimus, my paternal Grandfather, was born in the little village of Bredimus in Luxembourg. In that locality there was, and still is I believe, Bredimus Woods and Bredimus Castle. At one time there was the Count of Bredimus, but through a controversy between the nobleman and the Church the lands were taken from him. Also, correlating with this religious difficulty, a branch of the family broke away and came to America. This branch changed the name to Bredemus and there are one or two families by that name living in Minneapolis. At one time when Uncle Frank was in that city he called upon a man by the name of Bredemus who was a baker. As far as we can determine there are no persons by the name of Bredimus, or Bredemus, who are not distantly related to us.

The name Bredimus is of Roman origin and it is assumed that when the Romans moved up, or migrated, into Europe, that a clan, or family, by the name of Bredimus settled in what is now Luxembourg. That, perhaps, is the reason for the Latin ending of "us" in our name.

Grandfather had two brothers, Jean and Nicholas, and two or three sisters. The oldest sister came to America with the Sestier family and they settled near Des Moines, Iowa. It was due to her influence that the entire family of Great Grandfather Bredimus came to America.

Grandfather was an artist and his work in Europe and Egypt was that of a painter of scenic ceilings in large chateaux. I believe he had a crew of artists working with him and he was in Egypt several times on various work consignments. During one of these trips he became interested in the Mohamed religion - being of a curious turn of mind - but I understand that that interest came to a sudden stop when he was told that marriage with a Mohamed woman was being arranged.

Grandfather was in the French Army during the Franco-Prussian War and served as a linguist. He spoke nine languages and was in the department of the army which we would now term Intelligence Division. It was one of his duties to question captured prisoners.

One of the stories that interested me as a child regarding Grandfather's army experience was the one about when he was on night guard duty. He heard a rustle in the bushes so (he) called out "Qui va la?" No password was forthcoming and he repeated his question. No answer - so he said he would shoot. Still no answer - whereupon Grandfather fired into the bushes. The Captain came out at the sound of the shot and it was discovered that it was not the enemy but the Captain's pet dog that Grandfather had shot.

page three

Grandfather's sword held a prominent place on the wall of his home and the family has joked Uncle Frank about the way he would threaten the neighborhood boys, in the event that it looked as if there would be a fight, with the statement that he would go home and get his father's big sword.

As has been mentioned, Grandfather was in Egypt on business and met Grandmother on the boat returning to France. They were not married until the family returned to Egypt and it was from Cairo that Grandmother and Grandfather came to America. The trip to America was made by sailing vessel and the boat they were on was blown off its course and took three months to arrive at New York. Grandmother was pregnant with Aunt Fanny who was born shortly after their arrival in Des Moines where the entire Luxembourg family met.

It was Grandfather's custom in Egypt to wear a red fez and evidently he enjoyed wearing it and thereby caused much comment when he came to the States, and thence to Iowa, with such head dress.

At this juncture it interesting to know that the three brothers were all married before coming to America. Uncle Jean married Adelle Charlotte Barbolet (our very amusing and beloved Aunt "Ahdel" whom nearly all of us remember) in Paris, and Uncle Nicholas married his wife, Mary, in Alsace. Grandmother and Grandfather had married in Cairo and it was upon the family's reunion in Des Moines that the three wives met. Each brother had married a little red haired woman. There were seven children born to Grandmother and Grandfather – Fanny, Martha, Maurice, Frank, Raymond, Victor, and a little girl called "Litzi" who died in infancy.

Grandmother told me that most of the boys had been named for kings or emperors –my father, Maurice, for his uncle and given the middle name of "William" for Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany. Uncle Frank was named for his father- as well as Franz of Austria and Uncle Vic was named for Victor Emanuel of Italy.

Grandmother, due to her father's occupation, was given the opportunity to learn six languages. I was always fascinated by her knowledge of Arabic. She once told me of an Egyptian woman coming to the house with laces and rugs to sell. Grandmother was busy and did not wish to take the time to look at the woman's wear. The woman cursed Grandmother in Arabic and Grandmother called her down in the same tongue. The woman was so surprised and chagrined to find someone who understood her that she knelt down to kiss Grandmother's feet in apology.

Since becoming an adult I have greatly regretted that we Grandchildren did not take more advantage of Grandmother's linguistic capabilities and learned much from her. She and Aunt Adelle always talked

page four

in French to great extent, as did my father's family during his growing up. Those little bright-eyed French women probably hoped that we would respond to the sound of the tongue.

I shall always remember the funny instance when my mother gave a party for Aunt Adelle on her 83rd, I believe, birthday. I came in late to the party and greeted Aunt Adelle in French as well as asking her how old she was that day. She came back in French very quickly and scolded me for not reading the papers. It seemed that she had been interviewed by a reporter and her picture was in the paper. She felt that "Petite Harriette", as I was called to distinguish me from Grandmother, was quite amiss on the latest news. In the newspaper article Aunt Adelle told of her experiences during the Siege of Paris and how there was nothing but black bread - no white flour. The newspaper chap who called upon her spoke French which delighted Aunt Adelle and she told us that she surely liked "dot boy".

Grandfather's work in America did not follow the same line as that of his European occupation - due, of course, to the fact that there were not the lavish interior decoration put in the homes here. So he went into the carriage painting business and decorated and painted carriages. My father worked for him during his boyhood and seems to be the only member of the family to carry along the art line in his sign and commercial art work.

I have been told that there is a book, "The Duchy of Luxembourg"*, which tells in factual manner about the little section from which came the Jean Bredimus family. I've been unable to secure it but know that it must still be in publication as it was referred to in a National Geographic magazine article on Luxembourg last winter.

* "The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg" by Maynard Owen Williams

Research by Nicholas Bredimus