

The Baker and the General Practitioner Fons DeRoeck

This is a story of Alphonse DeRoeck and his wife Josepha Marie-Thérèsia Cornelia Debot. She is the daughter of my great granduncle and aunt Victor and Sophia (née Peeters) Debot. Alphonse (also called Fons, Buba and Phonse) married Josepha (also called Josephine, Josie, Mussy and Jepha) in Wausaukee, Wisconsin, in 1897.

Jeanette Slaets (née Joanna Wuyts), my great-aunt, wrote in a letter of September 22, 1897 to her 'Beloved' mother-in-law Angelina Slaets in Antwerp, Belgium:

'...Josepha is thinking of marrying again in springtime. This time to a Flemish boy (Fons DeRoeck) whose parents are also here. They live in Norway...'

Four years later (August 18, 1901) Jeanette wrote:

'...Josephine from Uncle Vic (Victor N. Debot) had a little boy (Leonard E. DeRoeck) in April. Josephine's husband had an accident in Norway about a month ago. He was out to plunder an eagle's nest when he fell out of a tree at 4 in the morning. He then tried to reach the road by crawling on his arms till his skin was gone. Almost all the men have been searching but he was not found. Then a little dog, which was with the men, found him. It was just in time as he was almost dead. He was paralyzed and at the point of death for several days. He is still weak but can already walk now. Otherwise they earn their living very well in their shop...'



Josephine Debot - DeRoeck

In the Michigan Iron county telephone directory I found listed under Norway and its neighborhood, some DeRoecks and I wrote them a letter. That way I came in contact with several who helped me with finding information, pictures and things worth knowing about this Fons DeRoeck, his family and about other Belgian immigrants.

With their information and my searching, for example in the governmental archives in Belgium, I learned that there was more than one DeRoeck family (written as De Roeck in Belgium) who migrated to Norway. At first sight they were not related, but they all were natives of Beveren or the villages around in 'Waasland' in East-Flanders.

Josephine's brother Edmund (called Ed) L. Debot had married a Julia DeRoeck, also of Norway. Were Julia and Fons brother and sister?

To find answers I put some family trees together and tried to connect the Norway DeRoeck's with their ancestors in East-Flanders. I didn't succeed in linking all the DeRoecks as it was too time consuming, but I found the information I needed.

Before I start with the story of my findings; Julia and Fons are siblings.

Let me tell you first something about Josephine Debot. She was born in Borgerhout in Belgium March 23, 1874 and migrated with her family to America in 1887. They settled in a forestry camp called Mastodon in the north-west of the state Michigan, and ended up in Wausaukee, Wisconsin, a few years later. This pioneer settlement was established in the middle of virgin forest in the north-east of Wisconsin in 1880. Josephine married Charles H. Lindstrom Sandstone in Wausaukee in 1894. He was born in Menominee in the state of Michigan. Josephine and Charles were living in the nearby Dunbar, where he worked as edger man in a sawmill for the Girard Lumber Company. Josephine gave birth to a son Rudolph August 19, 1895 and only a few months later her husband, 29 years old, died in a fatal accident. Charles was running the edger when the plank that was being trimmed pinched the saw and was thrown back, striking him in the side. As he was a member of the Dunbar Tent K.O.T.M. (Knights of the Maccabees Lodge of the woodmen) he was brought down to Wausaukee by a special train, the Dunbar Maccabees being on board. Josephine's cousin and my great uncle Louis Slaets, the president of the Wausaukee Maccabees, and his fellow knights followed in the impressive ceremonies of the Order and marched in the funeral procession which was one of the longest ever seen in the vicinity. Also Josephine's parents, Victor and Sophie (Fien) Debot, were members of this brotherhood.

The brotherly society of the members the Lodge of the Knights (and Ladies) of the Maccabees were mostly ordinary people such as foresters and woodmen. Their work was not only dangerous, but also a very uncertain, as they were out of work a lot of the time. Since it was so risky, insurance companies were not interested in selling policies to lumbermen. To provide themselves with a safety net many men and women became members of one of the branches of the Lodge of the Woodmen. This membership assured that they would receive money, after paying a monthly contribution, if they were out of work. The Lodge also provided help to the families of its deceased members. But they also joined as it organized pleasant social meetings. The Lodge had more than two hundred thousand members in 1896. They became a life insurance company in 1962 and changed the name to The Maccabees Mutual Insurance Company. As Charles Sandstone was a member of the knights, with whom he had his life insured, his wife received \$1,000.

Josephine and her son left Dunbar and went to live near her parents Victor and Sophie Debot in Wausaukee. Two years later Josephine acted as bridesmaid - and my great uncle Louis Slaets was best man - at the marriage of her sister Mary and Emile Everix. Her new brother-in-law Emile had invited a friend, Fons DeRoeck of nearby Norway. Emile and Fons both came from East-Flanders in Belgium and were bakers by trade. Emile was a son of the well-known Everix baker's family in Beveren and Fons was born in the nearby Rupelmonde. Emile and Mary started a bakery in Wausaukee in

1910. The Everix Bakery became one of the most modern bakeries in the state of Wisconsin.

Fons wasn't the only DeRoeck at that marriage as his father John, his stepmother Sophia and his sister Julia were guests. Cupid was also invited as Josephine married Fons in November 1897 in Wausaukee and his sister Julia married Josephine's brother Ed Debot May 11, 1898 in Norway.

But wasn't this an article about Fons DeRoeck! Let me start with his Belgium ancestors:

Petrus De Roeck married Maria Francisca Brijs May 21, 1776 in Bazel, now a part of Kruibeke, in East-Flanders. Their son Simon P. De Roeck, born November 14, 1786 in Bazel married Aurelia Bollé June 11, 1812 in Rupelmonde in East-Flanders. After the death of his first wife Aurelia January 15, 1832 Simon remarried Sophie Geleyn May 18, 1834 in Rupelmonde. His wife Aurelia gave birth to the twin brothers Josephus Jacobus and Pierre Jacque March 19, 1819 and Guillielmus March 17, 1822 in Rupelmonde. One of the twins, Josephus Jacobus, married Desideria Francisca Vercammen May 1, 1850 in Rupelmonde and their son Desiderius (John) Joannes De Roeck, born May 30, 1851 in Rupelmonde married Delphina Van Landeghem May 10, 1873 in Rupelmonde. Five children were born; Fons, Frank, Clara, Julia and a stillborn child. After the death of their mother Delphina February 27, 1880 their father John remarried Anna Sophia Staes June 22, 1881 in Rupelmonde. After the birth of Emma Maria, Maria Cesarina and Susie the family De Roeck migrated from Rupelmonde to Norway October 20, 1885. Fons was 11 years old.



Edmond and Julia in 1898

Norway is situated in Dickinson County in the Upper Peninsula of the state of Michigan and was originated in 1877 as an iron ore mining town and incorporated as a city in 1891. It attracted many immigrants from Scandinavian countries, Belgium, England, France, and Italy. Most of the immigrants worked in the mines. However men were also needed to work in the woods, cutting timber for the mines, and also for the railroads, so that iron ore could be transported. Many of the Belgium people were store and saloon owners. One of them was an Isidoor Joossens (in the USA spelled as Jossens) born June 12, 1857 in Beveren (Vrasene) in the province East-Flanders. He migrated two years later than the family DeRoeck and opened a saloon in Norway, and

was a good friend of Josephine's parents. In 1892 Isidoor was the president of the Flemish Brotherhood of Norway and the nearby Vulcan. This club was formed so that the Belgian could get together and fraternize, and they also had a bicycle and a pigeon racing club: the Belgian Pigeon Club. They also came together to play music and to sing their Flemish songs.

Three hundred and one people lived in Norway in 1900 who were born in Belgium, and ten years later almost twice as many: 573. As most of them built their houses in the same part of Norway it resulted in a Belgian quarter and even a street was called Belgium Town Road. The majority of them had their origin in the Belgian province of East-Flanders. Today nearly all of their descendants left Norway and settled all over America. At present Norway has a population of about 3000 and around 160 of them are still of Belgian ancestry.

Arriving in Norway the family DeRoeck had to find a place to live, earn a living and send their children to school. They were sent to the parochial school next to the Roman Catholic Church on Sunset Hill. The pastor was Father Kehoe and he had enlarged the church and built the school in 1883. But the first thing they, and also their parents, needed was a thorough command of English.



John and Anna (Staes) DeRoeck, Sophia (Peeters) Debot and daughter Josephine

John and Sophia Staes-De Roeck opened a saloon at 412 Nelson Street but they had no luck. It was June 9, 1888, a very hot summer day and many people were out of town when a fire started in one of the business houses in Nelson Street. Because of a shortage of water the fire very soon got out of hand and destroyed more than forty buildings. At the same time most of the children of Norway and their parents were attending a performance of the Barnum's circus in Iron Mountain and the DeRoeck's family was without doubt also enjoying the acrobatic acts. The Iron Mountain fire department arrived in about 35 minutes as it relied on horse power. After this catastrophic destruction most of the wooden buildings were replaced by new brick constructions.

Before I start writing about Fons here is some information about his siblings:

- His younger brother Frank DeRoeck was just 17 years, 2 months and 3 days old when he died after a brief illness of two days Friday 18 Nov. 1892 in Norway. He had been working in different city stores in Norway and up to the time of his death he had been employed at Hohiesol & Co.;
- Clara DeRoeck married Anton Treiber in Norway;
- Julia DeRoeck married Josephine's brother Edward Debot, of Wausaukee, in the St. Mary's Catholic Church in Norway Wednesday 11 May 1898. He was 20 and she 19 years old. The next day they departed to Wausaukee where their parents gave a wedding ball at the town hall, which was attended by a large number of family and friends. Sixteen months later, September 4, 1899 Julia gave birth to Marie and a son, Elmer was born May 29, 1903. Both were born in Norway. Ed and Julia Debot resided for only a short time in Norway (where Ed was a fireman), then went on to live in Wausau, WI, till 1913. They moved to Wittenberg, where Ed founded the Wittenberg Light and Power Co. He retired in 1930 after which they went to Stevens Point. Their son Elmer married Betty Collins Pffner, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, hence the naming of a part of the university after Debot and a Debot Scholarship;



Edmond and Julia DeRoeck-Debot

- Fons five half-sisters: Emma Maria married Walter F. Dudy June 15, 1910 in Norway, Maria Cesarina married Charles Marshall, Susan (Susie) married Oscar Schmidt, Edith Jeannette married Anton Trieber and Cesarine married Charles X Marshall in Norway.

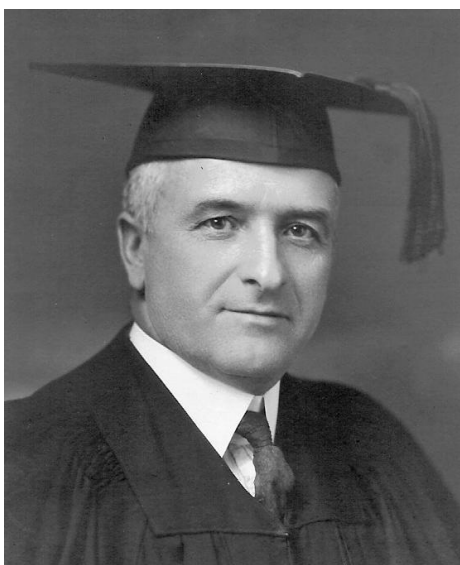
Fons liked sports, as brook trout fishing but also more active ones as bicycling. He tried always to be the best and with success, as a few times his 'heroic deeds' were described in the local newspaper: *'DeRoeck was out after brook trout, early in the week and got 24 that averaged a pound and a half'* and *'Alphonse DeRoeck of this city and Will Cruse had a bicycle race. The run was from Iron Mountain to Quinnesec. De Roeck winning by about 150 feet, the time on the race was 10 minutes and 50 seconds.'*

But he wasn't always that lucky as you have read in the introduction. After this accident his father thanked all who helped in the searching for his son: *'To all who so kindly assisted in any way in the search for my lost and injured son, last Tuesday (6/11/1901), I tender my sincere thanks. John DeRoeck.'*

The same newspaper wrote November 13, 1897: *'Last Friday, Alphonse DeRoeck who had left the city very quietly, Tuesday, returned from Wausaukee with a partner who will henceforth share his joys and sorrows. The young lady who has honored 'Phonse' by returning to this city with him as wife was named Josepha (née Debot) Sandstone and will be welcomed for both her own and her husband's sake. 'Phonse' has not called at THE CURRENT sanctum yet but our hearty congratulations await him.'*

Fons recognized her son Rudolph Sandstone as his and was renamed Henry DeRoeck. Fons and Josephine got six children, four daughters (Francis, Viola, Elsie and Marcella) and two sons (Leonard and Leon.) The oldest, Francis, was born in February 18, 1900 and the youngest, Marcella, October 14, 1914.

Fons and Josephine started a bakery and general grocery store on Nelson Street in the Mognoni building and it was said that it had the finest and best of everything in that line. But in about 1905 the buildings, particularly in the business centre, started cracking because of the mine below. Because of this the DeRoeck's salesroom had to undergo some repair work in 1906. But already a year later, in February, the mining company had to repair up their property, and that of their neighbors. It went from bad to worse as the pillars in their store were broken and sloping sides ways, and the center of the brick wall on the outside bulged out making it look pretty unsafe. To hold the walls for a time at least Solomonson, a carpenter from the Aragon mine, and his workforce placed a long rod that ran through the three buildings. But the ground was gradually giving away under a lot of buildings, and nearly every window on Main Street came out of its setting. This became so bad and dangerous that the responsible mining company, the Aragon mine, paid to move the business district and most of the town to a safer place to the south. The excavating of the new grocer and bakery shop began at the end of September 1907 and was erected in brick and cement bloc. The work had to finish very quickly as their store had to be torn down to prevent it from wrecking the neighboring buildings. And in the beginning of January 1908, the DeRoeck bakery and general store was moved to the new building on 317 South Nelson Street. It was said that it was one of the most convenient, well organized and artistic places in the city! And also after a cement walk adjacent to the DeRoeck's and the other buildings on Nelson Street was laid, the street had almost a metropolitan look!

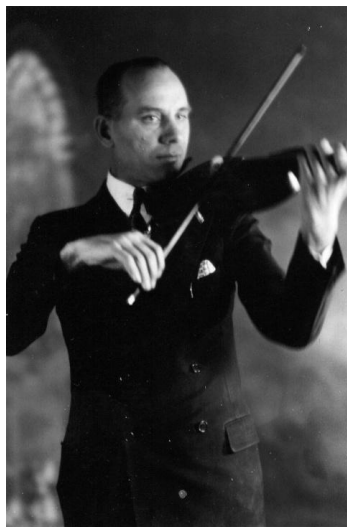


Alphonse John DeRoeck

Regularly they expanded and modernized their business to give a better service to their customers. Fons was also one of the first to buy a car and to build a garage next to his shop. But luck was not always on their side as on a Tuesday evening in November 1910, Olive Johns a shop-assistant caused an explosion while lighting a gasoline lamp and set the salesroom on fire. Before the fire-brigade arrived the fire was extinguished, but Olive's hair was burnt and her face was scorched.

When Fons had earned enough money he thought it to be time to fulfill his dream to help and heal people. The DeRoeck family moved to Chicago and he started to study for chiropractor in Davenport, Iowa, in about 1925. After he received his diploma at the Palmer College of Chiropractic he opened a practice in Chicago, Illinois. Fons didn't stop studying, and some years later 'the baker' became a full-fledged medical doctor in the same city in about 1930.

About Fons and Josephine's children:



Henry DeRoeck

- Charles (Henry) Henry DeRoeck was born as Charles H. Sandstone August 19, 1895 in Dunbar, WI and adopted by Alphonse DeRoeck in 1897. Already professor of music at the Range Community College in Hibbing, MN, he was called up for military training to camp Dix in New Jersey in 1918 and sailed with the SS Mauretania to France the same year. Henry was injured in action and promoted to the office of sergeant. On returning to civilian life, he married Lellah Fewell in 1921 and moved to Breckinridge, TX, where he was director and teacher of music for many years as well as a concert and professional violinist. He played in many theaters and churches and composed many beautiful pieces. He was a member of the Federated Music Club of Texas, the Breckinridge Chamber of Commerce, the Breckinridge Lions Club and a member of the Disabled American Veterans in Lake Superior, MI. He died January 16, 1974 in Skanee, MI. Not only Henry, but almost all the family, had a turn for music. They were so talented that they formed an ensemble: 'The DeRoeck Orchestra.' They brightened up marriages, parties, banquets and all kind of other festivities with their music. For instance, they played at the Jubilee mass and during the evening banquet for the 50th wedding anniversary of Alphon's parents-in-law, Victor and Sophie Debot, in Wausaukee, WI, in 1921, and had the honor of playing at the grand opening of the Cuculi's opera house in Channing, MI, in 1915;



The DeRoeck Orchestra - Alfons, Viola, Leonard and Henry DeRoeck

- Viola Francesca DeRoeck was born February 18, 1900 in Norway, MI, married Cassel (Cass) Ambrose Burris April 30, 1921 in Ranger in Texas. Viola died May 13, 1995 in Mason (actually Alaiendon), MI;



Viola DeRoeck

- Leonard Edward DeRoeck Sr. was born March 11, 1901 in Norway, MI, married Florence E. Brockhaert May 1, 1926 in Chicago, IL. He died May 27, 1975 in Elmhurst, IL. She was born Sep. 2, 1906 and died Feb. 3, 1974 in Elmhurst, IL;



Leonard E. and Florence Brockhaert - DeRoeck

- Elsie DeRoeck was born June 9, 1903 in Norway, MI, married (1) Reginald (Reggie) Quayle and (2) Henning Anderson. Elsie died in 1996 in Arizona;
- Leo DeRoeck was born July 2, 1904 in Norway, MI, married Elizabeth Ann Varda Sept. 6, 1924, in Vulcan, MI, and they moved to Gladstone, MI, in 1935 were they owned and operated DeRoeck's Sporting Goods shop on 10th Street from 1948 until their retirement. Leo died January 31, 1982 in Escanaba, MI.



Leo DeRoeck with set of drum

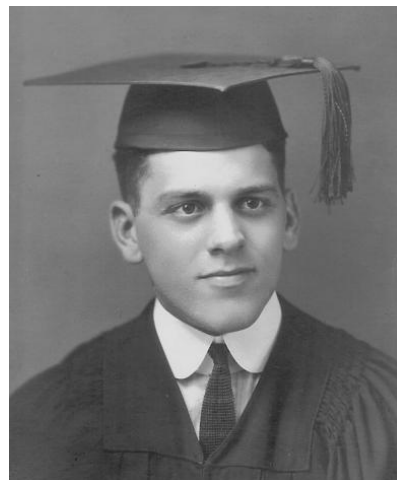
- Marcella (Tuitsie) Delores DeRoeck was born October 14, 1914 in Norway, MI, married Melvin Tiegs in July 1938 in Chicago, IL. Marcella died in June 29, 2002 in Renton, Washington.



Viola, Leonard and Henry DeRoeck

After an illness of several weeks Dr. Alphonse (Fons) John DeRoeck, 73 years old, passed away at his home in Chicago, Illinois April 10, 1947 and fifteen years later his wife Josepha (Josephine) Marie-Thérèsia Cornelia Debot died December 18, 1962. She was grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of 30.

Their funerals were organized by the De Vriendt funeral home. This funeral home was used by most Belgians, and most of them were buried in St. Joseph's cemetery. The De Vriendt family no longer operates De Vriendt's, although it's in the same location in the old Belgian neighborhood in Chicago.



Leonard E. DeRoeck

Fons' father John DeRoeck died Tuesday morning 26 August 1913. He was 63 years old, and a resident and businessman in Norway for about 29 years. All John's children were married at that time, only his daughter Susie was still at home. Fons' stepmother Anna (Staes) DeRoeck, 85 years old, passed away Thursday evening 4 December 1941 at the home of her daughter, Emma Dudy with whom she has made her home for 29 years. Anna has lived in Norway for 55 years.

The old Bakery and General Merchandise, 317 Nelson is currently 728 Main Street and is now in use by the Norway St. Vincent DePaul charity organization that contributes to the poor.

Dominique L. Van Rentergem.
Antwerp, Belgium

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Back row: Elsie, Viola, cousin Oakley Treiber & Henry. Front row:
Leo & Leonard DeRoeck, Christmas 1907 in Norway, MI