

Biography of Auguste Joseph Elisa Lion and Silvie Charlotte Marie Antoinette Acar

The following is the story of the life of Auguste Lion and Silvie Acar as told from official records and the stories passed down through several generations. It is unknown which stories are completely true and which are only partly true. But, it is doubtful that any of the stories are completely false, since there is always a shred of truth in every family tale, even if it combines elements from unrelated events. Some of the stories were passed down through separate branches of the family and arrived at the current generation in several somewhat different forms.

Auguste Joseph Elisa Lion was born November 26, 1851 at St. Josse ten Moode in Brussels, the only known son of Pierre Francois August Joseph Lion, a professional military man, and of Marie Amelia Therese Eugenia VanderTaelen of Louvain. Pierre had been born in 1809 to Pierre Joseph Lion in Dinant, Namur where a street in the middle of town leading to the court house is named after Pierre Joseph. It is unknown why Auguste's daughter, Augusta, always said that her father was born in Gent in 1849, since no connection with Gent has been found.



Silvie Charlotte Marie Antoinette Acar, as she was recorded in the 1856 census living at 195 Nederstract in Audenarde, East Flanders, was born March 5, 1856 to Camille Acar, a lawyer, and Blondina Pieraert. She was recorded at birth as Silvia Charlotte Maria Antonia, but the spelling in the records varies as they change back and forth between French and Flemish depending on who was in power. The Acar family had lived in Audenarde since 1800, three years before Camille was born, coming there from Deinze. At the time of Silvie's marriage, her father Camille was "solicitor of the court of the first authority and local advisor for this city". According to family stories, Camille took Silvie around town as he collected rents from the many properties which he owned. Silvie had a well-to-do upbringing, with her education taking place in a Catholic convent where feminine accomplishments such as sewing were taught.

Auguste was an army officer in the cavalry as early as 1873 stationed in Louvain when his father died there. His father Pierre was a retired infantry major at the time of his death. In 1877, while stationed in Audenarde, although his domicile was listed as Louvain where his mother still lived, Auguste married Silvie Acar. Her mother had died shortly after Silvie's birth, leaving her as the only child, and Silvie was raised by a step-mother Elisa Colette Minnaert who then added two half brothers. Her father, Camille, died only two months after Silvie's marriage.

One story that has passed down through the family tells that while Silvie was in a convent in Louvain, she somehow met the young, dashing military officer Auguste from Audenarde (apparently home on leave) who got her pregnant, so she was expelled from the convent. However, the records clearly record their marriage on May 29, 1877 in Audenarde following consent on May 12 by the military authorities and publication at the main town halls of Audenarde and Louvain on May 20 and 27. Augusta was born on February 13, 1878, 9 months and 1 day after consent was given to marry.

Two more children were born to Auguste and Silvie in Audenarde, Albert on January 18, 1879 and Fernand on April 21, 1880.

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Further uncertainty to the story which follows is caused by a record in the immigration records of New York which show an August Lion, age 31, of France, arrived in New York aboard the "St Germain" from Le Havre on 18 May 1882, with a destination of Montreal Canada. His occupation is reported as "n.p.", presumed to mean "no profession". Our Auguste would actually be 31 the following November, but he was "in his 31st year" as it was sometimes referred to. If he had just quit the military, he would truly have "no profession". Perhaps he was scouting out Canada for the family.

Auguste and Silvie next appear in official records in Hailot, Namur, Belgium, certainly a very small, out-of-the-way village, where twins were born on January 29, 1884 and Ester was born on



April 21, 1885. The twins, Gastone and Felix, both died within a week. At the births and deaths of his children there, Auguste listed his occupation as "industrialist". Hailot is less than 20 miles from Dinant where Auguste's father had been born and is still not much more than a farming community. (Photo of the center of town today.)

Not wishing to become engaged in further wars with Prussia (he undoubtedly remembered the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871), Auguste took his family to Buenos Aires. (Another descendent says it was to Rio de Janeiro in 1879.) However, conditions there were harsh, especially for the small, delicate Silvie who had grown up in fairly luxurious conditions. The food in the open-air market was not what they were used to in Belgium and there were flies everywhere. Supposedly, Silvie miscarried when she heard news that Auguste had fallen off a horse (or, according to another family story, it was she who fell).

Auguste was soon convinced that conditions in Belgium had improved, so they returned. It is not clear when (or if) this occurred, and whether the trip to South America was before or after the time spent living in Hailot. Another family story says that they traveled directly from Argentina to Canada. Augusta related that she remembered living in a big house with many paintings on the wall and that they began to disappear before the family moved. If the move to Argentina had been before Hailot, Augusta would have been too young to remember the house and paintings in Audenarde, being probably only 4 when they left, so it is likely that the trip to Argentina was after 1885.

However, finding that conditions in Belgium had not improved, or else going directly from Argentina, they then emigrated to Canada, but it is unclear when that was. While the 1901 census reports that they immigrated in 1892, this seems unlikely since Jean was born in Quebec Province so early in January that year. There could be no immigration directly to Quebec that early in the year as the St. Lawrence River is frozen, so immigrants had to sail to Halifax and travel by train. The 1906 census reports 1891, which is probably correct.

Upon arrival there, Auguste and Silvie first tried to operate a chicken farm near Montreal where daughter Jean was born on January 7, 1892.

When the chicken farm didn't work out, Auguste took his family to Manitoba where, according to further family stories, they first attempted homesteading near Dauphin Lake, north of Winnipeg. According to this story, while there, Aunt Mae (more about her later) took one of the

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boys (or some say the twins) to buy flour at the store about 10 miles away. The son froze to death, and Aunt Mae lost part of her feet. This was apparently Alfred who died on April 1, 1893, but likely in Montreal.

However, by June 6, 1893, Silvie was in Winnipeg when she ran this ad in the Manitoba Free Press. The bit about "Paris" was surely a self-promotion which no one could disprove.

Auguste is mentioned in the Manitoba Morning Free Press on March 26, 1894 in a lawsuit against Edmond Didion¹.

DRESSMAKING.

MR.S. LION, late of Paris, begs to announce that she has opened a dressmaking establishment in this city, and is now ready to receive orders for the latest style of dresses at 295 Garry St.

By some accounts, Auguste was a very proud man and, knowing nothing about farming, he was useless. After all, he had been trained as an army officer and was used to giving orders and not doing any work himself. When the homesteading was obviously not working, Silvie left her family on the farm and moved to Winnipeg, hanging out a sign as a dressmaker to support the family. She was listed in the 1895 and 1896 city directory without Auguste. How she afforded this house, where Silvie was listed as the primary resident, is unclear, but likely from her own inheritance. After she had earned enough, the whole family came and, by 1897, "A and Mrs. Lion" were listed at the same address and by 1900 at 291 Garry, a 2-story house which had stood on the site since the 1870's, and later (1904-1907) they lived across the street at 278 Garry. According to one family account, Fernand remained at the homestead however, he was in the 1901 census in Winnipeg and in the Winnipeg directory in 1903. There is no record of the homesteading process ever being completed by the Lion's. (Today, there is a 2-story building at 291 Garry, now listed on the Historic Buildings Inventory, which was begun in 1909 as a 1-story cafe to replace the 2-story house and later itself expanded to two stories. The other Lion residences on Garry Street are now parking lots.)

According to some family recollections, Auguste was conceited, liked to boss people around, and would not work, so the family was supported largely by money from Silvie's family in Belgium. This could be true, as her father, apparently a wealthy man himself, died only two months after Silvie's marriage and her mother had died many years before when Silvie was only 3 years old. Since Silvie had apparently been her mother's only child, she may have received a sizable inheritance. Auguste's record of "occupations" after he left Belgium would tend to support this story. Besides the chicken farm and the homestead, he listed his occupation in 1897 as "artist", and in 1897-1904 he was a chocolate manufacturer at "Lion's Chocolate Factory" at 264 Fort (between Graham and Portage). However, the next year, in 1905, he was a "machinist" at Lion Chocolate Factory which was then owned by G. R. Vendome and his son Fernand Lion was "foreman". (Nearby, at 308 Fort today, is the Vendome Hotel, built in 1900 and listed on the Winnipeg Historical Buildings inventory.)

¹Edmond Didion was born in 1854 in Belgium, immigrated in 1879, and died in 1934 at St Rose (du Lac), Manitoba. In the 1891 census, he was in the Rosedale subdistrict of the Marquette District, in 1901 in the Ochre River subdistrict of the MacDonald district, but all later census records show it as Dauphin District, Township 23 and 24, Range 14 and 15.

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The "machinist" occupation matches with another family story that he built the first automobile in Winnipeg. A photograph of him by a car (with the results of a hunting trip) is supposed to be the car he built in 1899 or 1900 with "Prof Tendrick" (as written on the back of the original). In fact, the photo is of a 4-wheeled car, while the official report of the first car brought into the city by Prof. Kenrick, a chemist at St John's College, in 1901 was a Knox, a 3-wheeled velocipede. It was destroyed in a fire in 1911. Auguste is recorded in 1910 as having Manitoba driver's license No. 129 and he was likely one of the 14 men who

started the Winnipeg Automobile Club in March 1904 at Prof Kenrick's home, although evidence of this has not been found. Prof Kenrick died in January 1905.

The Winnipeg Telegram, in an article about the trip made May 23, 1903 to Selkirk (about 24 miles away) reported that there were only 19 automobiles in Winnipeg at the time, one of them, a "gasoline runabout", owned by August Lion. It was also reported that "Lion had already produced his own vehicle and engine in his chocolate factory on Fort Street after several years of experimentation".

Even though Auguste was apparently one of a small number of Belgians in Winnipeg when "Le Club Belgie" was formed on October 4, 1905, there is no evidence that he was a member then or later. An April 8, 1898 article in the Manitoba Free Press about Lion's chocolate factory says that he explained the process to the reporter "through a translator", so he apparently did not speak English well enough. In the 1916 census, Silvie is listed as speaking English, French and Flemish. In 1901, Auguste listed his "mother tongue" as French, but that he was Canadian nationality.

Although the family was Catholic while in Belgium, in later years they were not. While Silvie was struggling to keep her family solvent in Winnipeg, the priest came to her and said, "Madame Lion, you know, as a good Catholic, it is necessary for you to contribute to the church." She replied, "Father, I am not able to provide for my family and still give to the church." He said "Madame Lion, if you do not do this, you and your family will be excommunicated from the church." to which she replied "So be it". (They were all Catholic in the 1901 census. In the 1916 census, she and two children were reported as Catholic, while Fernand is shown as Anglican and Ester as Congregational.)

Auguste died on November 6, 1911 at 205 Garry, the home of his daughter Ester, and is buried in Brookside Cemetery. Silvie survived him by 27 years.

Now a word about "Aunt Mae" who was with the family in Belgium, in Argentina, and emigrated to Canada with them. Aunt Mae was Mary de Muynck, b. Oct 17, 1862 in Belgium, but not a relation. Beginning as a young girl, probably at about age 16, she was Auguste and Silvie's servant, helping care for young Gussie and then the other children that followed. With her around, Silvie never had to prepare a meal. Aunt May became devoted to the family, moving with them many times, and caring for the children, and then some of their grandchildren. When Auguste and Silvie's daughter Jean Marie had four children in 1918-1923, Aunt Mae was sent to help her. She died after the 2nd World War, during which she received an award for knitting

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socks for the soldiers. She was missing part of her foot and several variations of the story are told by the family, all involving a Lion son who froze to death while they were going for supplies.

Interestingly, the 1916 census says that Mae could speak English and Flemish, but not French.

Part of the legacy of Auguste Lion involved the new invention, the automobile, supposedly with him building the first one in Winnipeg. In 1911, his son Fernand owned the "Exchange Garage" and then in 1912 "Lion's Auto Garage" at 230 Fort. In January 1914, "Lion's Garage" was incorporated by Fernand, motor engineer, and Sanford Pierce, his brother-in-law, who listed his occupation as automobile dealer. Sanford had returned to Winnipeg where he had married 10 years earlier, after living in Grand Forks, ND and Portland, OR. They advertised as "repairs for Ford and White cars". It was still going strong in 1922 when this ad was run. In 1915, the Plews Automobile Company at 530 William Ave sold REO automobiles, probably owned by Auguste's future son-in-law Ralph Plews. Ralph's father David had been a windmill and pump manufacturer in Ontario.

The children of Auguste Lion and Silvie Acar were:

1. Augusta Marie Silvia 13 Feb 1878 (Audenarde) - 20 Apr 1963 (Minneapolis)
2. Albert (Alphus) Adele 18 Jan 1879 (Audenarde) - 1 Apr 1893 (Quebec)
3. Fernand Lambert Marie 21 Apr 1880 (Audenarde) - after 1916
4. Gaston Joseph Elisa 29 Jan 1884 (Haillot, Belgium) - 5 Feb 1884 (Haillot)
5. Felix Robert 29 Jan 1884 (Haillot, Belgium) - 1 Feb 1884 (Haillot)
6. Ester Louise Emile 21 Apr 1885 (Haillot) - 13 Oct 1963 (Winnipeg)
7. Jean Marie Albertina 7 Jan 1892 (Montreal) - 1964 (Winnipeg)
8. Gabrielle Augusta Camille 7 May 1894 (Winnipeg) - 6 Jan 1982 (Winnipeg)

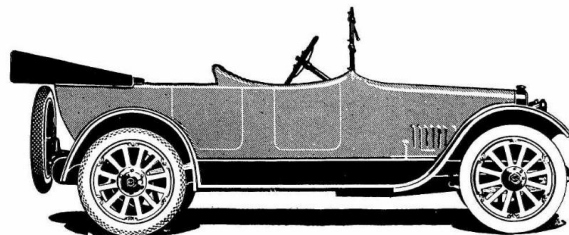
Auguste Lion's occupations:

1873 (at death of father) demarichal des logis chef de cavalerie
1877 (at marriage) under lieutenant of 2nd regiment of Guides, domiciled in Louvain
1878 (at birth of Augusta) under Lieutenant
1879 Lieutenant 20th regiment
1880-1881 gap - maybe in South America
1882 made a trip to Montreal as "no profession"?
1883 gap, maybe already in Haillot
1884-1885 (at birth and death of twins in Haillot) industrialist
1886-1891 gap - may have been in South America
1891?-1893? Chicken farmer - Montreal?
1893?-1895 Homestead - Lake Dauphin?
1897 Winnipeg City Directory - artist
1900 City directory - chocolate manufacturer at 264 Fort
1901 Census - chocolate manufacturer

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1903 City directory - chocolate manufacturer
1904 same - Lion's Chocolate Factory at 264 Fort (between Graham and Portage)
1905 machinist at Lion Chocolate factory, G.R. Vendome proprietor
1907 machinist
1911 (died)

Residences in Winnipeg:

1892-1893 Montreal?
1893-1895 Dauphin Lake?
1893 Mrs Lion opens dressshop at 295 Garry
1894 Auguste mentioned in Paper as filing lawsuit (but could be anywhere in Manitoba)
1895-1896 Mrs S Lion at 271 Garry
1897 A & Mrs S at 271 Garry
1900 August and Mrs August at 291 Garry
1903 Agust, Madam Sylvie, Agusta, Ferdinand at 291 Garry
1904 August and Ferdinand Lion 278 Garry
1905-1907 278 Garry
1910 205 Garry (list of driver's licenses)
1911 Died at 205 Garry, witnessed by Ester Lion of same address.
1911 Madame Sylvia Lion, Fernand, Ester, Gene Lion at 205 Garry
1913 Fernand Lion 163 Atlantic Ave, Mme Lion 205 Garry
1916 Sylvia at 299 Balmoral

References:

1901, 1906, 1911, 1916 Census of Manitoba
Winnipeg City Directories 1894-1915, 1922
Birth, marriage, death, census records of Audenarde, Belgium (LDS)
Birth, marriage, death records of Louvain, Belgium (LDS)
Birth, marriage, death records of Brussels, Belgium (LDS)
Birth, marriage, death records of Dinant, Belgium (LDS)
Auguste Lion's death certificate
Letter from Augusta (Lion) Pierce (about 1960)
Letter from Constance (Plews) Pratt (grand-daughter of Auguste Lion) January 29, 2000
Family memories by Joan (Plews) King (grand-daughter of Auguste Lion)
Newspaper articles from the Manitoba Free Press
From the Manitoba Archives:
 1910 List of automobile licenses in Manitoba
 Articles of Incorporation, Lion's Auto Garage, January 1914
 Incorporation papers (October 4, 1905) and records of Le Club Belgie
 Cash Books, Lion's Chocolate Factory, 1898-1902
Canadian Automobile Club web site at: www.caamanitoba.com/web/else/about-history.html
New York Immigration Records

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"Willie Chaffeur vs. Tommie Horsemen - earliest automobiles on Winnipeg's streets", Bruce Cherney, www.winnipegrealestatenews.com/Resources/Article/?sysid=722

15 July 2012

Revised 30 March 2017

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