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History 190 Final

Bousson Environmental Research Reserve: A History

Bousson: Rags to Riches, Riches to Rags, Rags to…?

Throughout history there have been many classic tales of “rags to riches” where the impoverished and penniless overcome great adversity and are able to spend the rest of their lives swimming in luxury and wealth. However, it is not often seen that this scenario occurs, and then just the opposite happens several years later, causing the wealthy to live in poverty once again. This is exactly what happened to the French family, the Boussons. The Boussons came to the United States in poverty, became wealthy in New York and moved to Frenchtown, PA, and after several unfortunate events were again left penniless. A few years after the Boussons had disappeared from the property in Frenchtown, it fell into the hands of Allegheny College. The property was initially used for recreation and some environmental and biological research, but today it is used only for research. Since the early 1800s, the property has been altered and changed in ways that fit the current times’ needs. Are the glory days of the Bousson property over as the college moves into the future, just as the Boussons had lost their wealth and left the property in shambles over a hundred years ago? The Bousson property should be conserved not only because of the sentimental ties of the lavish lifestyle that was once there, but because of the history of the property and the connections that Allegheny College hold to it as a place of fun and memories, and academic research.

The Bousson family story begins in the village of Foncine-le-Bas of the Jura district near the Swiss border of France, and ends in Cleveland, Ohio (Ericson). In the early 1800s in Foncine-le-Bas there lived a French government employee named Pierre-Alexandre Jeunet who was married twice and had five children. The children were Jeanne-Françoise Cesarine, known as Cesarine, (1801-1879); Marie (1803-1871); Xavier (1807-1899); Josephine (1813-?); and Joseph (1814-1888) (Poux). Of the five children, the least is known about Marie and Josephine. Neither Marie nor Josephine immigrated to the United States like the rest of their siblings; they remained in their birthplace in France. Marie never married and became a nun later in life. Josephine married Jean-Marie Bourgeois, of Foncine-le-Bas, and had a daughter in 1831 named Anastasie. Anastasie married Aime-Achilles Poux, and the couple immigrated to Frenchtown, PA in 1888, where the Bousson estate was later located (Ericson).

Cesarine, Xavier, and Joseph all travelled to the United States to begin the rest of their adult lives. Prior to moving to the United States, Cesarine married charcoal-maker Claude-Antoine Bousson, known as Claude, (1811-1879) and settled in Foncine-le-Bas for several years (Ericson). In 1840, however, the couple decided to move to the United States so that Claude could avoid the draft into the French military service (Poux). The couple also hoped for a better, more financially stable life in the “land of opportunity” (Ericson). Cesarine was the first of the Jeunet children to move to the United States. Cesarine and Claude settled in a small Connecticut town near New York City (Unknown). Claude made charcoal for one of the New England iron furnace companies.

However, Claude and Cesarine did not often get along with each other because “Cesarine wore the pants in (the) family,” so they decided to separate after the births of their four children. (Unknown). The children of Cesarine and Claude were Alfred, whose birth and death dates are unknown and died at the age of ten; Marie-Lydie, known as Lydie, (1844-1924); Marie-Therese Othilie, known as Othilie, (1851-1884); and Adolph, who grew to adulthood but birth and death dates are also unknown (Poux).

Cesarine and her four children lived in Connecticut for several years before moving to New York. Although Claude did not have any influence in his children’s, or Cesarine’s, lives, he too moved to New York and always lived close by to the family (Unknown). Cesarine was said to have moved to New York to find a suitable occupation in order to feed her family, and to seek new opportunities in a big city (Unknown).

Xavier immigrated to the United States in 1851, a short time after Cesarine and her children moved to New York (Ericson). Xavier had remained in France to take care of his ill father, Pierre-Alexandre. While Xavier had been caring for Pierre-Alexandre, he was exempted from the draft into the French military (Ericson). However, after his father’s death at the age of 99, Xavier was no longer exempt, so he decided to follow in Claude’s footsteps and move to America to escape the draft into the French military service all-together. He moved in with Cesarine and her children in New York, and found a job as a guard of a watchmakers shop (Ericson). Xavier earned 50 cents a day, and gave everything he earned to Cesarine to buy bread for the family, after sending most of his money back to France to help relatives still living there (Ericson).

Joseph Jeunet, Cesarine and Xavier’s brother, married Louise Courteau in 1840 in his birthplace of Foncine-le-Bas, France, and the couple immigrated to the United States in 1853 (Unknown). The couple lived in New York for a few years with Xavier and Cesarine’s family, until deciding to move to Frenchtown, PA in 1854 (Ericson). Xavier and Louise moved to Frenchtown in order to live near other French immigrants that had come to America before them. In the early 1830s, French immigrants began settling in this Northeastern part of Pennsylvania, later named Frenchtown after its inhabitants (Ericson). Many of the immigrants who lived there were from the Jeunet’s hometown of Foncine-le-Bas and encouraged their loved ones and friends who still lived there to come to Frenchtown for a better life. This community was a close-knit group, and when Joseph died in 1888, it was reported that he did not speak much English. This was an “indication that the isolated character of the community made English unnecessary” (Ericson).

When Cesarine and her family first moved to New York they were extremely poor. It was reported that Lydie, Cesarine’s oldest daughter “ was walking the streets in winter, looking for work, and wishing that lightening would strike her dead” (Unknown). However, Cesarine began making men’s shirts for the carriage trade and selling them. Her business became so successful that it expanded into a full factory located at 751 Broadway, which opened in 1866 (Unknown). “The workmanship was faultless, and she soon gained a valuable reputation, leading her to set up a factory, which immediately boomed” (Poux).

After the business and factory was well established and organized, Cesarine put her daughter Othilie, who was 15 years old at the time, in charge to manage the factory (Ericson). After Cesarine put Othilie in charge, she had little to nothing to do with the business. Cesarine retired to Frenchtown, PA to be closer to her relatives, especially Joseph and Xavier, who were already living there. Claude always stayed close to Cesarine, and followed his ex-wife to Frenchtown when she moved. He built a small cabin directly behind her house on the property in Frenchtown that later belonged to Othilie and Lydie. Xavier had moved away from his sister in New York in the early 1850s, and settled in Frenchtown, PA to be closer to Joseph and the other French immigrants (Ericson). Xavier married Lucrece Dunand in 1858, and their daughter Esther Jeunet was born in 1868 (Ericson). Esther played an integral role in the retelling of the Bousson story for the writing of this family history.

The teenage Othilie was successful with her shirt factory, and she proved to be an excellent businesswoman and manager (Poux). In 1869, she was awarded a “Medal of Excellence by the American Institute of New York, for her shirt production” (Unknown). The shirt factory served a lot of New Yorkers, and the shirts were in high demand because of their excellent quality. Among the customers were well known and wealthy people of the age including the Astors, Vanderbilts, and the Goulds (Unknown). Former president Ulysses S. Grant who was living in New York in retirement bought shirts from the factory as well (Poux). The factory employed between 50-100 workers, and had 200 sewing machines at the peak of production (Ericson). Wages of the employees were meager, so Othilie and her sister Lydie, who assisted with the factory affairs, made a large profit from the operation. The sisters made over $500,000, an enormous amount of money for the late 1800s, in the following 10 to 15 years that Othilie was in charge (Poux).

After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Othilie and Lydie dedicated themselves to helping the people of France that were made destitute from the war. The sisters sent shirts from the factory directly to France to be given out for free, and Othilie was appointed the chairman of one of the International Red Cross committees (Ericson). As the leader of the “ ‘Comité Central de Souscription en Faveur des Blessés Français et des Familles qui ont souffert par suite de l’invasion’ (Central Subscription Committee for the French wounded, and families who have suffered from the invasion),” Othilie was responsible for collecting money, medicine, blankets, and clothing to send to the French who had suffered from the Prussian invasion (Unknown, Poux). Othilie and Lydie travelled all over the United States raising funds and collecting food and clothing donations to send overseas. During this time, rumors spread through all of Frenchtown that the donations collected from their travels never made it out of the sisters’ pockets (Unknown). However, these have been “totally discredited by those who knew the Boussons well” (Unknown). The French government awarded Othilie a diamond-studded medal and gold jewelry for her service, donations, and dedication to the people of France that had been struck by such disaster (Ericson).

Now that the sisters had transitioned from rags to riches, Lydie and Othilie began to spend the gross fortune of over half-a-million dollars that they had compiled over the past ten years (Unknown). After helping with the Franco-Prussian war efforts, Lydie personally made eleven trips to France to visit friends and family (Poux). Both sisters spent two years, from 1877 to 1879, touring through Europe (Unknown). While abroad, Lizzie McGrath (a long-time servant and friend of the sisters) and George Winters (one of the clothing cutters at the factory) would manage the factory and the business affairs.

While abroad in Paris, France, Othilie met Martin Friedrich, who was born in Munich, Germany in 1861 (Unknown). Martin was “finishing his doctoral studies in Philology (linguistics)” at one of the universities in Paris (Ericson). Othilie Bousson and Martin Friedrich were married there on February 18, 1879, and their first child Emilie-Othilie (called “Dolly”) was born on November 27, 1879 in Paris (Ericson).

When the sisters and Martin returned to the United States in 1879, they decided to move to Frenchtown, PA to be closer to relatives and friends (Ericson). Lydie and Othilie were especially fond of their Uncle Joseph, and wanted to be close to him. Othilie also had not been feeling well, and she hoped that living in the country would “renew her strength and vitality, which had not returned to her after the birth of her daughter” (Unknown). However, this “strength and vitality” would never return because Othilie had been suffering from the early, progressive stages of “consumption” or tuberculosis. The same year, their mother Cesarine and their father Claude both died (Unknown). In 1879, Lydie, Othilie, and Martin decided to move onto their deceased mother’s property that they had purchased for in 1863. Othilie and Lydie purchased the 135-acre property for $3200 in October of 1863 from Isaac and Elizabeth Gleason (Unknown). The property was located on the north side of the Oil Creek River. The sisters gave this property to Cesarine after the successful establishment of the shirt factory, and after she passed on the business to Othilie and needed a place to live in Frenchtown (Unknown). Cesarine built a small frame house there, and Claude moved into a small cabin next to her. After their deaths in 1879, Othilie transferred the property to Lydie, and the sisters and Martin moved onto the property.

Othilie decided to sell the shirt factory to George Winters, a clothing cutter, when they moved to Frenchtown (Ericson). Although the factory was booming around the time that the family decided to move to Frenchtown, it eventually shut down. The factory “went into decay and shut down because of obsolete business practices,” and the Bousson mansion in Frenchtown eventually gained the 200 sewing machines from the factory, which were stored in the attic (Ericson).

With the large fortune that the sisters had amassed from the shirt factory, Othilie and Lydie purchased more property while still in New York, before travelling through Europe. The sisters bought the 169-acre William Warner farm in January of 1881 for $5000, which happened to be the property next to the one that Othilie and Lydie acquired after the death of their parents (Ericson). Lydie and Othilie kept purchasing land for their property in Frenchtown, and eventually came to own 321 acres by 1894, and had paid a total of $8,950 for the entire property (Ericson).

However, Othilie, Lydie, and Martin were living the life of luxury and fortune, and decided to tear down Cesarine’s house and Claude’s cabin to build a mansion that was more suitable for their family and represented their lavish lifestyle. In 1881, they hired Auguste (Gus) Poly, a cousin who resided in Frenchtown, to build a two-story mansion out of brick (Unknown). Gus was paid $8,500 for the job and made all of the bricks on the Bousson mansion site out of soft, local clay. The mansion “was 42 feet square, and two stories high, with a slate mansard roof, which gave space for a very large three-room attic” (Unknown). The house was situated on the south side of Oil Creek Road, and faced east with porches running along both sides and the front. The mansion was one of the few with running water and an indoor bathroom (Ericson). The 12-room mansion (six rooms on each floor) had a dumb-waiter that ran to all floors, cupolas, and a large basement that served as a kitchen and a bakery in the winter (Poux). In the summer, the cooking was done in the summer kitchen, which was located in a small building behind the mansion (Ericson). The roof “over the central hallway was all glass” which provided an excellent source of natural lighting (Ericson). Initially “a large wood-burning furnace heated the whole house by radiators; later, coal was used” (Unknown). The house was not only fit for royalty based on the structure, but the furnishings of each room were unique and just as expensive.

Most of the furnishings of the house were imported from France with a “Victorian splendor” (Unknown). Paintings covered the walls and there was even a Rosa Bonheur original, picturing a cat playing with a spool of thread, among them (Unknown). In each of the rooms stood ornamental fireplaces covered with imported tile, each with a theme specific to the use of the room. In one of the corner rooms was a schoolroom in which the fireplace tiles depicted “scenes from Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’” (Unknown). Among the furniture were gold-leafed Louis XV chairs and mahogany and rosewood armoires (Ericson). When Lydie, Othilie, and Martin first moved into this mansion in 1883, their relatives “secured 200 canaries, and let them loose in the house to greet the sisters when they arrived” (Poux).

On the 321-acres of the Bousson property, there were several other buildings, other than the mansion and the summer kitchen. On the north side of Oil Creek Road stood two barns, a smaller and a larger one. The smaller of the two barns was used to store hay and was “built by Paul Richard in Victorian style” and included a cupola and stain-glassed windows (Ericson). The larger barn housed the children’s ponies, two yoke of oxen, a few carriage horses, and several cows (Ericson). However, the family did not work on the farm. They brought Lizzie McGrath with them from New York to help take care of the mansion, and William Reynolds worked on the farm as the foreman. The family had many other employees in order to cook, clean, and care for the farm under the direction of William Reynolds (Ericson). The employees also cared for the grounds and landscaping around the Bousson estate, including caring for the five lily ponds and one lake that had been built by Xavier, their uncle, in 1865. The sisters also had imported shrubbery and planted sugar maple trees in distinct rows that can still be seen surrounding the property (Unknown).

In order to pay the many employees that worked on the Bousson estate and have some incoming money, the sisters decided to build a steam saw, planing, and shingle mill in 1883. The mill processed local timber for lumber and shingles, and was built behind the barns on Little Sugar Creek (Ericson). Also in 1883, Lydie was appointed the postmaster of a newly created post office called the ‘Bousson Post Office’ in February (Ericson). The post office was moved from the base of Kiser Hill near the public school into the Bousson mansion after Lydie became the postmaster, a position she held until the Boussons moved to Cleveland in 1895. Although the Boussons had moved on, the post office remained open until Frenchtown decided to discontinue it in October of 1900 (Unknown). Lydie, Othilie, and Martin also sold the sugar made from the sap of the sugar maple trees, hoping that it would serve as a “get-rich-quick” scheme for the family (Norton). Although this scheme did not work as well as they would have hoped, they did make a profit from selling the sugar.

The Bousson mansion was always a place of fun, social gatherings, and luxury. In the prime years of the Bousson mansion, which were unfortunately only several, the Bousson mansion was the epitome of Frenchtown wealth and luxury. The mansion had a crystal chandelier in one of the central ballrooms that was later donated to the St. Hippolyte Church, in 1888, by Lydie and Othilile in honor of their mother, Cesarine (Poux). The chandelier and commemorative plaque can still be seen at the church today. The family hosted wedding receptions, holiday gatherings, parties, dinners, balls, and children’s parties for Dolly and their son Alfred (named after Lydie and Othilie’s deceased brother) who was born on July 25, 1883. There was constant singing and French music playing in the house for the family and guests, and musicians were brought to the mansion during Christmastime for caroling around the Christmas tree.

It was once reported that “on the eve of a great dinner party” the Boussons were having at the mansion, the guests arrived at the mansion only to find that the doors were open, candles were burning, and the table was set, but no one was home (Norton). Apparently the Boussons had close to half-a-million dollars hidden in the basement, and when three horsemen found out they attempted to steal the money (Norton). However, the servants of the Bousson mansion discovered the men as they were trying to steal the money, and the servants beheaded all three horsemen. “Scared out of their minds and not bothering to tell the headless riders that there was no money in the basement, the Bousson family and their servants left whatever they were doing and fled for their lives” (Norton). This ghost story, among other legends surrounding the mysteries of the Bousson property, were told throughout Frenchtown to keep the Boussons alive after they had fled the property, and to tell as a great story that adds to the history of the community.

Martin Friedrich did not have an occupation during his time living at the Bousson mansion, and he truly was a “country gentleman in the true sense of the word” (Ericson). “He slept late and read late, from his large library” (Unknown). Martin enjoyed spending his days conducting scientific agricultural experiments, reading, and writing. Martin was fluent in five languages and spent a lot of time writing poetry in French and German, and “his son (Alfred) claimed that he had real talent” (Unknown). Martin always homeschooled his children and even invited neighboring children to attend his lessons. In the community of Frenchtown he was seen as a leader and was involved in the public education and local theater productions: often presenting and directing them himself. Lastly, he saw to it that his mansion was always well landscaped with “imported lilacs, rose trees, and other rare and costly shrubs from France, to add beauty to the surroundings” (Unknown).

Tragedy after tragedy struck the Bousson family, however, starting in 1883. These series of unfortunate events led the Boussons down a path that they could never recover from, until they were forced to move to Cleveland in 1895. In 1883 (the same year of construction), the steam saw, planing, and shingle mill burned to the ground, destroying one of the family’s sources of income and ceasing to create lumber for the Frenchtown community (Ericson). On June 10, 1884, Othilie passed away from the consumption that she had been battling since the family moved to Frenchtown (Unknown). Lizzie McGrath and Lydie stepped into the caretaking roles for Dolly and Alfred, while Martin continued to homeschool the children. By 1887, the Bousson fortune had dwindled down to $240,000 from the over half-a-million dollars the family had accumulated from the success of the shirt factory in New York (Poux). This financial pressure on the family was feeling after years of spending and spending in the life of luxury began to worry Lydie, and she made several failed attempts through bad investments to regain that fortune.

Lydie was advised by the “shyster lawyer” Emilé Caleron of Cleveland to invest $10,000 in bank stocks, just before the bank failed and all the invested money was lost (Ericson). Lydie then went on to invest another $10,000 in the Belgian Glass Works in Meadville, PA where she actually sat on the board of directors, however, the firm went bankrupt shortly thereafter and all the money was again lost (Unknown). Lydie then invested $40,000 in real estate in the Richmond Block in Meadville (Ericson), which was also a failed attempt to make money, and her investment was lost. Lastly, Lydie made the largest investment mistake of all in 1893 (Unknown). As advised by Caleron, Lydie invested the remainder of the fortune, although the country was going through somewhat of a business depression, in a tin mill that “went into the hands of a receiver, and the family (went) completely bankrupt” (Unknown).

In a last effort to gain back the money that they had lost and spent, the family decided that it would be best if Martin went to medical school and started a medical practice. They family had just enough money to send him to medical school at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland and take a yearlong post-graduate trip to Europe (Ericson). In Europe, Martin studied in Italy and at the Sorbonne (a university) in Paris, France (Unknown). While Martin was in Europe, Lydie took care of the estate in Frenchtown, and “brought up Dolly and Alfred in an isolated, restrictive atmosphere” (Ericson).

Upon Martin’s return to Frenchtown, he tried to establish a medical practice, but repeatedly failed. In 1894, Lydie transferred the 321-acre property to Dolly and Alfred for $1000 to avoid foreclosure. Martin was eventually appointed as the Head of the Cleveland Board of Health, and the family decided to move in 1895 from their Frenchtown mansion to Cleveland, closer to Martin’s work (Poux). “The family moved permanently to Cleveland, living in a modest house on W. 14th Street and rent(ed) out rooms to local workmen, to supplement their income” (Poux). Martin was well-respected diagnostician (physician) and “did a lot to end the epidemic of typhoid and smallpox that ravaged Cleveland in the late 1890s” (Ericson). Martin held this position and was for the only source of income for the family until he was killed in a trolley accident in 1921 (Poux). Lydie would “bring the children out to Bousson for the summers (after the move to Cleveland) but they did not have enough money to live as well as before;” Lydie died in 1924 in Cleveland (Unknown).

The children of Othilie and Martin did not amount to much, however, Alfred was much more successful in life than Dolly. In 1917 Alfred and Dolly decided to split the shares of the mansion, and Alfred sold his share of it in 1920, while Dolly lost her share in 1928 to the sheriff’s sale (Ericson). Dolly and Lydie always dreamed of reopening the mansion and returning to the “glory days” of luxury and relaxation at the grand mansion. These aspirations never transformed into action, because neither Dolly nor Lydie could ever afford to move back to the mansion (Ericson). Dolly married “a Hungarian factory worker named Boti” sometime between 1920 and 1925 (Unknown). Dolly outlived Boti and died in Cleveland on May 20, 1953 (Ericson). “She was a very helpless individual, and could not take care of herself. She was used to being waited on, having been brought up like an ornament” (Unknown). On the other hand, Alfred graduated from the Case Institute of Technology and did post-graduate work at Harvard University, graduating from there in 1908 with a degree in Mining Engineering (Unknown). Alfred married Bessie Regan in 1911 and had four children: Jeanette, Karl, Mary Alice, and Paul (Unknown). Shortly after Alfred married Bessie they moved to California where they spent the rest of their lives. Alfred survived until at least 1961, when Allegheny College student Jack Todd Ericson interviewed him about his family history and the Frenchtown Bousson property.

After the family moved to Cleveland, the Bousson mansion was left in the hands of the Frenchtown residents to do with it as they pleased. Esther Jeunet (Lydie’s Uncle Xavier’s daughter) attempted to care for the mansion while the Boussons were in Cleveland, however it was heavily vandalized and furniture, wood, and the priceless items that were left by the Bousson family were stolen and destroyed. The mansion was eventually razed in the 1930s because it was so torn apart by thieves and weathering. All that is left of the Bousson mansion today is a gaping crater where the magnificent mansion once stood, bricks scattered around the perimeter, and an occasional treasure can be found if one looks hard enough.

After the Bousson property had journeyed from rags to riches and then back to rags, the fate of the property ultimately found itself in the hands of Allegheny College, all because of the beloved Professor Chester A. Darling. However, before Allegheny College ruled the property, the Kiwanis Club of Meadville purchased 143 acres of the 321-acre property from the sheriff’s sale for $100 in 1928 (Helmreich). The Kiwanis Club sponsored a Boy Scout troop, and the property was used as a summer camp for the boys (Norton). The troop generally held their activities at a site behind the Bousson mansion, which was still standing at the time, or in the larger of the two Bousson barns. The troop was led by Dr. Chester Darling, who was the Chairman of the Allegheny College Biology Department. Under his direction Allegheny College purchased this land from the Kiwanis Club in May of 1935 for $1,500 (Norton).

“That the picturesque 143-acre Bousson farm has become the property of Allegheny College for use as a sports center and nature study laboratory was revealed in an announcement made late last week,” read the May 1935 edition of “The Campus,” the Allegheny College student-run newspaper (College Buys). In 1936, the college purchased 220 acres of the Allen family farm. When Allegheny bought the property from the Kiwanis Club the larger of the two barns and the “heavily vandalized” Bousson mansion were still standing (Norton). The Kiwanis Club had torn down the smaller of the two barns because it was in shambles and was not worth trying to renovate. In the late 1930s Allegheny razed the mansion, and the students went straight to work on making the property their own.

The honorary biology fraternity Phi Beta Phi, whose advisor was Dr. Darling, moved onto the site and began constructing a cabin at about the same time as the Outing Club began building a cabin of its own (Helmreich). Both of these Allegheny groups took wood and other supplies from the larger of the two Bousson barns that still stood on the property. The Phi Beta Phi cabin was located a mile northwest of Lake Siple: where the Outing Club cabin, also known as the student cabin in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was located. Lake Siple was already on the property, but when Allegheny bought it the college deepened the lake for swimming and built a dam and a spillway (Helmreich). The lake was named after Paul Siple, a 1932 Allegheny graduate and Antarctic explorer (College Buys).

The Phi Beta Phi cabin was finished in December of 1936 and the larger Outing Club cabin with a huge stone fireplace and slept about 30 students was finished in May of 1937 (Norton). A third cabin was built around this time for faculty use. It was located between the Phi Beta Phi cabin and the Outing Club cabin, and any faculty member could use it as long as they paid $1.50 per year (Helmreich). This cabin was later known as the caretaker cabin in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and students could live in this cabin during the school year for free, as long as they maintained a presence on the Bousson site (Ostrofsky). Also in the late 1930s and early 1940s, trails were laid all over the property with the help of biology professor Dale Thomas who was very familiar with the Bousson property (Norton). From 1937-1945, Phi Beta Phi planted around 10,000 pine seedlings along Oil Creek Road and at the trail intersection above Lake Siple (Norton). During this time, students who could not afford to attend Allegheny could help plant these trees and would be paid so that they could attend (Ostrofsky).

After all three cabins were constructed and the students became more and more familiar with the property, years of recreation and research ensued at Bousson. There were bonfires, ice-skating and sled riding, and more that aired on the side of fun happening at Bousson. One of the biggest advocates of fun and recreation at Bousson was Darling himself. Darling was constantly pranking his students and his “true PhD may have been in practical joking” (Helmreich). On multiple occasions, Darling lured his students to sample the Indian turnip plant, which caused their mouths and tongue to swell and blocked their ability to speak (Helmreich). In 1932, Darling reported stole “John the Stiff,” the cadaver from the human anatomy lab that was located in Alden at the time, and buried him on the property where he knew students would find him (Helmreich, Norton). The students found him with only a finger or a hand sticking out of the ground, and soon a full-blown investigation ensued. The story ran in the local newspaper for several days and the police were involved (Helmreich). However, Darling confessed that it was only a practical joke that was his doing, and surely faculty and students were not too surprised.

Bousson was also a place of environmental and biological research for students and faculty. The Phi Beta Phi fraternity was continuously conducting research in the forest of Bousson and using Lake Siple as a water ecosystem. In the early 1940s and into the 1950s a “Summer Session” was offered by Allegheny College for students to stay on campus over the summer and conduct research at Bousson (Field Biology). “The Field Biology Program during Allegheny’s Summer Session has been designed to give field experience through the use of Bousson Farm area and a maximum of outdoor field work” (Field Biology). During the summer sessions, students also took classes including ornithology, botany, and herpetology (Field Biology). The research of the students supplemented these classes, and allowed them to have hands on experience for field that they were studying.

The 1960s and 1970s were not kind to the Bousson property and the cabins, and vandalism and particularly rowdy college students became a normal occurrence on the property. “The Biology Department, by then more focused on genetics and microbiology than flora and fauna, no longer visited Bousson frequently. Other interlopers did invade with pick-up trucks, six-packs, and rifles” (Helmreich). On commencement day in 1981, when there were no students or faculty around, the cabins were razed and the debris from the cabins were mostly left at each site on the property. This caused great concern to faculty and staff, especially those of which used the property for research. “ ‘They want to make it as unattractive as possible so they can solve the liability problem,’ claimed Dr. Milt Ostrofsky, referring to the Bousson Recreation Area” (Tsontakis). In the summer of 1981, Lake Siple was drained and the college “dug up the road at Bousson because vandalism damage made maintenance costs unreasonable, according to Dean Don Skinner” (Tsontakis). Eventually the college maintenance cleaned up what they had left behind, however, this did not relieve the disappointment that students and faculty felt after seeing the ruble that had once been a source of laughter, fun and many practical jokes.

From the 1980s to today, the Bousson Environmental Research Reserve has been living up to its name as a place of scientific research of the forest. There are “aquatic habitats (that are) being studied by Professor of Environmental Science and Biology, Scott Wissinger” (French Creek). Also located on the property are “DIRT Plot areas that (are) monitored and experimentally manipulated by Professor of Environmental Science, Rich Bowden” (French Creek). Biology Professor Milt Ostrofsky, Geology Professor Rachel O’Brien, and other environmental science and biology professors conduct research and take students to Bousson for classes, labs, and research (Ostrofsky).

From the very beginning of the Bousson story, there have been both great times and horrific times in its history. After the rags to riches and back to rags events of the actual Bousson family history, where is the future headed for the Bousson property under the control of Allegheny College? The property has already gone through some great and rough times, but is the best yet to come? According to Dean of Students Don Skinner in the early 1980s, “Bousson is memories. Memories of the days and seasons, of friends and sharing; above all… of ferns and moss and fungi, of the beauty of unperturbed tranquility” (Skinner). Can memories be all that the Bousson Environmental Research Reserve is worth? With the issues of fracking and drilling that currently surround the property, a source of money is not how the Bousson Forest should be known and remembered by. Bousson should be a place that is worth conserving not only because of the memories and the rich history that lies in the forest, but because of the environmental research and science that can still conducted on the site, and is ongoing there, for future generations of Allegheny students to come.

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