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Lot 1, Block 4: Searching for the Grave of Anthony Morse

By Lisa Lindell

My fascination with family history began with my maternal grandmother's stories. As a child, I loved quizzing her about the lives of her parents and grandparents, prodding her to reach as far back as she could into her memory and family lineage to tell me their stories.

Her ancestors, English, Scottish, and French, had come to North America in the first half of the seventeenth century. Settling in the British colonies and New France, they participated in many of the events and movements that shaped the continent. The family tales my grandmother told focused on deeds of female heroism, male soldiery, and the pioneering experience. Admittedly, not all of these stories can be verified. Passed down from generation to generation, they have inevitably become embellished and distorted. Nevertheless, I was and still am captivated by them. Through these stories, history comes alive for me and I feel a sense of connectedness with the past.

The French side of my ancestry has especially intrigued me. This link comes through my grandmother's grandfather Andrew Jackson Morse who was of French-Canadian descent. That he was named for a president impressed me mightily, as did his service in the Civil War. My grandmother used to recount how Grandpa Morse would delight his grandchildren by counting in French for them and telling them of his Civil War experiences. Treasuring these family stories, I began to trace

my French-Canadian roots, a quest that has continued now for over a decade. The experience has exceeded my expectations, resulting in the discovery of the names of hundreds of ancestors; valuable and lively correspondence with relatives and fellow genealogists; and a deep interest in Canadian and American history.

My mother's sister had first begun the genealogical search by following back in time the federal census records for Andrew Jackson Morse. Knowing that Andrew had lived in Morrison County, Minnesota in the 1880s, she was able to trace in reverse his perpetual westward course, locating him in Waushara County, Wisconsin in 1870; Adams County, Wisconsin in 1860; and ultimately in Lewis County, New York in 1850. This, we discovered, was the county where Andrew had been born on November 12, 1836. His parents were listed as Anthony and Eliza Morse.

Anthony and Eliza thereupon became the focus of my search. My active involvement in the genealogical process began in New York. Here (on a visit from my home state of South Dakota) I found in the Lewis County Court House in Lowville my first significant information about Anthony. Stored near the ceiling in the courthouse were Anthony's 1846 naturalization papers. Reaching up with a long pole, a helpful employee brought down the drawer containing the records. I was thrilled when I realized that I was handling the original documents. The papers stated that Anthony had come to New York from Lower Canada in 1817.¹ The federal census records had identified Anthony's birthplace as Canada, but offered nothing more specific than that.

At a standstill in tracing Anthony's lineage back any further, I directed my efforts toward following his trail in the United States. I determined in particular to find the place of burial for Anthony and Eliza. From the census records, I knew Anthony and his family had moved from New York to Waushara County, Wisconsin between 1850 and 1855 and had settled in Adams County, Wisconsin before 1860. After 1860 I lost track of them. Although I knew (also from the census records) that several of their children had eventually left Wisconsin, others had remained. I conjectured that the elder Morses may well have lived out their lives in Adams County, residing near their children and dying before 1870. Aged 54 and 53 in 1860 according to the federal census, they could well have died within the next decade. Therefore I checked for Wisconsin death records, but I learned to my disappointment that few of the state's records predated 1878 and that the State Bureau of Vital Statistics had not been established until 1907.

Unsure how best to proceed with my search, I began to comb the cemeteries located nearest the last known residence of Anthony and Eliza. I was attending graduate school in Wisconsin at this time and was therefore able to carry out my research on weekends. When my family came to visit, I dragged them with me on cemetery expeditions. We spent some memorable times tramping through snow-covered Adams County cemeteries but to no avail. There was no sign of Anthony or Eliza.

At this point, the discovery of an 1870 Adams County land record redirected my search. I found that Anthony and Eliza had granted a life lease to their son Julius and that the residence of Anthony and Eliza was Dodge County, Minnesota. Excitedly turning to the Minnesota federal and state census records, I found Anthony and Eliza living near Mantorville, Minnesota in 1870 and near Milton, Minnesota in 1875 and 1880. There I again lost their trail. So once more I sought death and burial records, checked cemetery records, and wandered through a few cemeteries, this time in Dodge County, vainly searching for Anthony and Eliza's graves.

Since my cemetery sleuthing was not paying off, I refined my approach and began searching for the marriage and death records of Anthony's children.²



Mary Ann and Andrew Jackson Morse

Tracing their whereabouts, I reasoned, might give me some clue of Anthony and Eliza's final location. Soon I had gathered marriage records for six of the nine children and death records for three.³ But the locations given in these records were in Wisconsin and Minnesota, places I had already checked for Anthony and Eliza. The most important information gleaned from these records was that Eliza's maiden name was Dezotell (or Desautels). But having no more specific location for her birth than "Canada," I was not then able to trace her ancestry.

Again an impasse. Then I unexpectedly received a letter from a third cousin once removed who was also tracing the Morse family line. This cousin, Verna Leetch, had obtained my name from a distant relative who knew of my interest in the Morse family. Verna was descended from Andrew Jackson Morse's oldest sister Julia, and thus was a direct descendant of Anthony and Eliza Morse.

Verna had found a query in an old issue of a Wisconsin genealogical newsletter. The inquirer, another Verna (Verna Koebel), was seeking information on John Morse/Massé, the older brother of Andrew Jackson Morse. With great anticipation, I immediately wrote to the listed address in Surrey, British Columbia; but my letter was returned marked address unknown. My expectations substantially lowered, I contacted the Surrey Public Library, asking if they could locate a current address for Verna Koebel. I was in luck. The library sent her new address, and my second attempt at contacting Verna brought fantastic results.

cemetery were buried Lewis Morse, his wife, and one of their sons. Jerome's daughter Jessie was also buried here. But there was no sign of Anthony. Somewhat discouraged but not ready to give up, I talked with the couple who kept the cemetery's records. To my surprise and delight, their records revealed three unmarked Morse graves in the Colman cemetery: one for Jerome's wife Betsy Morse; one for an unnamed baby (of Betsy and Jerome); and the final unmarked grave for an A. Morse. Could it be Anthony?



**Colman Cemetery, Colman, South Dakota
The grave of Lewis Morse, son of Anthony.
The unmarked grave of A. Morse (lot 1, block 4)
is off to the right.**

My excitement turned to frustration as I realized that I might never know for sure if this was Anthony's grave. But suddenly it occurred to me that there might indeed be a way of lessening the uncertainty. I checked the coordinates of the A. Morse grave in the Colman cemetery. They were lot no. 1, block no. 4. Could the "lot 14 block" specified in the letter from Verna Koebel actually be lot 1, 4 block? I concluded that this was indeed the case. In all probability, I had at long last found Anthony's final resting place.

Although I still don't know where Eliza is buried or all that I would like to know about the lives of Anthony and Eliza, I am astonished by what I have found. Born nearly 200 years ago in Québec, in a time and a place completely alien from that which I know, my great-great-great-grandfather Anthony

incredibly ended his life just twenty miles from where I now live. With the invaluable help of the two Vernas and my family and the allure of my grandmother's stories, I have been able to unravel more of my French-Canadian ancestry than I dreamed possible. I love puzzles, family stories, and history, and I have greatly enjoyed, and amply benefited from, my genealogical quest.

NOTES

1. This date of 1817 may be an error for 1827. I have found no evidence that Anthony's parents ever left Canada; and in 1817, he would have been only 13 years old.

2. I had previously sought birth records in Lewis County, New York, where all the children had been born. There I had found only one record. It was for a yet unnamed baby boy Morse, born December 25, 1849. Later I was able to match this record with Lewis W., the Morses' eighth child.

3. Eventually, I found marriage data for all but one of the Morse children and death dates and places for five of them.

4. In my search, I have found many variations in the spelling of Morse. The name appears as Massé or Macé in Québec records. After Anthony immigrated to the United States, it is spelled Morse and occasionally Moss.

5. I am indebted to two Chambly genealogists for their generous help in locating baptism, marriage, and death records for me.

6. For additional information on the *filles du roi*, see Joy Reisinger and Elmer Courteau, *The King's Daughters* (Dexter, Mich.: Thomson-Shore, 1988); Thomas J. Laforest, "The King's Daughters," *Heritage Quest* 22 (May/June 1989): 7-12; Silvio Dumas, *Les filles du roi en Nouvelle-France* (Québec: La Société Historique de Québec, 1972); and "Reluctant Exiles: Emigrants from France in Canada before 1760," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 46 (July 1989), p. 482.