

## **'Rev. Peter Joseph Franciscus Cautereels'**

Composing the book *'Letters from Wausaukee to Antwerp 1887 - 1937'*, that tells us something about the lives of the emigrants' families Louis and Joanna Wuyts - Slaets and Victor and Sophie Peeters - Debot, I had to look up some names of people and places that appeared in their letters. One was a priest/doctor with the name Cautereels. My great-uncle Louis F. Slaets wrote about him in a letter sent to his *'Beloved Mother'* from Wausaukee, Wisconsin, December 13, 1898 (letter 15.) Louis wrote:

*'Moeder, ik heb over eene maand met onzen kleine Alphons naar eene plaats geweest waar eenen Antwerpsche pastoor woonde, zijn naam is Cautereels, hij komt van de kante van Borsbeek, gij zult hem misschien wel kennen. Hij is hier gekent voor eene goeden dokter, maar ik heb nog al veel afgezien, ik moest daar met een paard naar toe rijden en het is ten minste 88 mijlen van hier en het regende gedurig, maar wij zijn toch content dat wij dat hebben gedaan, want dien priester zegde dat zijn armke zal genezen.'*

Or in English:

*'Mother, I went with our little Alphons to a place a month ago, where an Antwerp priest lives, his name is Cautereels. He comes from the environment of Borsbeek. Maybe you know him? Here he is very well known as a good doctor. I went through a lot of pain, as I had to ride to him on a horse and it is at least 88 miles from here and it rained all the time. But we are very content that we have done it, because the priest told us that his little arm is going to cure.'*

### **Who was this Wisconsin doctor and priest?**

I asked Missio, the Pope Mission organization, if they knew a priest Cautereels, who was sent to Wisconsin before 1898. Although they keep records of the missionaries, he was not in it. They advised me to ask the Antwerp Bishopric Secretary-Archivist. As he, also, was not able to help I tried to trace him in the village of Borsbeek. But also the Borsbeek Fathers Assumptionists didn't know a Cautereels. I could try to find him in the governmental archives, but as I had no birth year or birthplace and wasn't sure of the correct spelling, it could be a hard nut to crack.

### **Album Pastorum.**

Around that time I became a member of the Antwerp genealogy Yahoo internet group and I asked the members if anyone could help me. I received this e-mail a few days later:

*'In Album Pastorum, lists of deans, pastors and chaplains diocese Antwerp (1801-1981) of J. Maeriën there is a pastor Cautereels of the Saint Nikolas parish of Hemiksem. Namely: Joannes Franciscus Cautereels, born in Borsbeek January 3, 1833 and he was ordination December 19, 1857. He became pastor in Hemiksem September 21, 1877. His retirement and when deceased are unknown. A new pastor was appointed in Hemiksem June 23, 1882. He is one of the few where the information is not complete, what makes it compatible is that he emigrated. Try to find more information about this priest in Hemiksem. Greetings Wim.'*

## **Heemkring Heymissen.**

And this is what I learned from the local historical group of Hemiksem:

‘Cautereels (*Peter Jozef*) became first assistant priest of the Saint Elisabeth hospital in Antwerp and appointed as pastor in Hemiksem (Hemixem) September 21, 1877. He left this parish in June 1882 and went to North-America, where he started earning a living as a stock-broker but very soon he became a pastor in DePere, Wisconsin. Later he became a professor at the Catholic seminary in Green-Bay. He was also a history writer and some of his books he wrote include:

- De doode reiziger of de Sans-Culotten te Antwerpen 1866;
- Vroolijke Clara, of de slag van Turnhout in den Patriottentijd, 1866;
- De held van 't jaar 30, of Frederik de Merode te Berchem, 1866 Hendrik de Baanstrooper, eene gebeurtenis uit de XVIe eeuw, 1866;
- Het slot van Herstal, of Alpaïs en Plectrudis, eene bladzijde uit de vaderlandsche geschiedenis der VIIe en VIIIe eeuw, 1867;
- Yulinka, Geschiedkundig tafereel uit de XIIIe eeuw, 1867;
- Het trouwkleed, herinneringen van het jaar 1814, 1867;
- Het lotje van Baden, eene zedenschets van onzen tijd, 1867;
- Eemtje de Maleis, of weldaad en dankbaarheid, 1867.

He also wrote articles for the magazines ‘De Familiekring’ and the ‘Vlaamsche Kunstbode.’ In Wisconsin he became the editor of the weekly ‘Recht door Zee’ and also wrote for the ‘DePere Standaard’ newspaper and ‘De Volkstam.’ The many letters he sent to his friend, Edward Ipers, in Antwerp in Belgium were published under the title ‘Onze taalbroeders in Noord-Amerika, Brieven over hun huiselijk, burgerlijk en maatschappelijk leven en verdere bijzonderheden, door C.P. van Antwerpen. Bijengebracht door Edward Ipers, Antw. 1885.’

I also found this information: ‘He studied classical philosophy and theology in the seminary of Mechelen (Malines) in Belgium, in which institution he was appointed professor of Latin after his consecration to the priesthood, at Mechelen, in December, 1857. He and his maid left Antwerp with the *Vaderland*, a steamship of the Red Star Line, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June and arrived in New York July 10. He was in charge of four congregations in Brown County till the year 1892, when he came to the Church of the Holy Cross, at Bay Settlement. Mr. Cautereels was also rector of St. Francis Convent and was held in the highest regard as a pious Christian servant of the Master.’

He was pastor of the St. Martin Church in Tonet, Township of Red River, Kewaunee County, Wisconsin from May 1885 till August 1886.

After Father Cautereels' death at the Bay Settlement December 4, 1903, Bishop Fox asked the Norbertine Fathers of DePere to take over the mission of the Holy Cross in Brown County.

He wrote these books about Wisconsin's history:

- Commemorative Biographical Record of the Fox River Valley Counties of Brown, Outagamie and Winnebago 362 1895;
- Commemorative Biographical Record of the West Shore of Green Bay, Wisconsin including the counties of Brown, Oconto, Marinette and Florence 362 1896.

**P.C. van Antwerpen.**

Impressive, but I had still questions:

- Why did he leave Belgium?
- Why did he become a stock-broker?
- Why did he wrote in Belgium under his own name and after he left the parish of Hemiksem as P.C. van Antwerpen?
- Did he become a medical doctor?

The next information I received from Hemiksem gave some answers:

‘As a writer he was on friendly terms with many Antwerp artists and that brought a lot of expenses ... he ran up debts ... and used money the parishioners had got together for a pilgrimage to Scherpenheuvel. In a police report you can read that he asked Louis, the sexton of the Saint Nicolas church, the day before the pilgrimage to advance the money or he would kill himself (*‘I’ll shoot myself through the head.’*) Because of this he disappears but continued writing articles. He was sought after and the examining magistrate Moureau learned that the fugitive had the intention of escaping to *‘Wisconsin U.S.A. entre la lac supérieur et le lac Michigan.’* He was accused of this and many other things he probably had nothing to do with. Rev. Cautereels was convicted and sentenced to five years in the house of correction on January 9, 1883 but he was then already, working as a stock-broker, far away in Wisconsin. He continued working for the *‘Vlaamsche Kunstbode’* but now under the pen-name P(ieter) C(autereels) van Antwerpen. When he died he was a professor at the Catholic seminary in Green-Bay.’

**Caricatures and poems.**

The Antwerp newspapers of that time, especially those not Catholic, wrote a lot of articles about him and even caricatures and ‘poems’ were specially made and distributed. One of the ‘poems’ was:

*‘Peer Cautereels, pastoor vóór dezen,  
eenen dief, zo dief als laf,  
die de rechtbank heeft verwezen  
tot vijf jaren tuchthuisstraf.  
Die Peer, die Peer,  
dien dienaar van de Heer,  
die zien wij hier nooit weer!’*

In the Catholic newspaper De Gazet Van Antwerpen of November 5, 1891 we read:

*‘Wij hebben Het Laatste Nieuws uitgedaagd te bewijzen, dat wat wij over zekeren pastoor van Vlaanderen schreef, geene eerloosheid was. Tot hiertoe heeft het blad niet geantwoord; wij hadden dus wel gelijk te zeggen dat het nieuwe klerikaal schandaal in het vruchtbaar brein van Argus of Bert ontsproten was en daar alleen bestond. Wij raden Het Laatste Nieuws aan voor leuze te nemen: hier fopt men Frederik.’*

Or in short:

*‘That the story of an infamous priest of Vlaanderen or a new clerical scandal is raised out of the fruitful minds of Argus or Bert (from the liberal newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws) and that it exist only there.’*

This article tells about a 'new' clerical scandal in 1891, but Cautereels was already convicted and had flown to Wisconsin eight years before!



Rev. Cautereels

### **The Belgian fight about schools of 1879 (De schoolstrijd van 1879)**

A lot had to do with politics, as a few years before, in 1879, there had been a fight in parliament over schooling between the Catholics and the liberals which also spilled over into the newspapers. For the liberal newspaper 'Het Laatste Nieuws' this clerical scandal was like a gift from heaven.

And still no information about Peter Jozef Cautereels' medical qualifications?

Sources: *'The Historical Society of Hemiksem (Heemkring Heymissen)'*, *'Album Pastorum - diocese Antwerp (1801-1981) of J. Maeriën'*, *'Gazet Van Antwerpen'*, *'Het Laatste Nieuws'*, *'The State of Wisconsin Collection'*, *The Antwerp library*, *'The Digitale bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse letteren'*, *'The dead records for Holy Cross Church, Bay Settlement, WI'*, *'The Diocese of Green Bay record of priests'*, *'A Glimpse into the Past, A History of the Town of Scott.'*, Rev. Charles Denys and Wim D'hooge.

Dominique L. Van Rentergem

P.S.: Alphonse Slaets' arm never healed.