

Joseph Urgel Archambault (1872-1941)

doctor and Mayor of Hull

Note: We wish to thank the writer of this text who allowed us to publish it with her compliments.



“[...] Joseph-Urgel Archambault, son of Dr. Damase-Eusèbe and Elmire Méthot was not from Hull, but from Saint-Pierres-Becquets where he was born on June 22, 1872. [...]

“Joseph-Urgel made his entrance to the Seminary of Nicolet at thirteen years old. He studied there from 1885 to 1891. He went on to study medicine at the Université Laval. He graduated in 1896. He settled in Hull in the month of September of that same year. [...]

“Upon his arrival in Hull, the young 24 year-old doctor-surgeon started by taking care of his career. He inaugurated an office on Leduc Street, [...] but was moved out by the "Big fire" of 1900. He then moved on Charles (now Frontenac) Street until he had a superb house built with an adjoining office in 1905, on Main Street (du Portage). [...]

“Far behind us is the time where doctors would make house calls in a horse drawn carriage! Doctor Archambault had a horse, *Jos*, that he kept until grazing on Courcelette Street, and later on Wright Street, and finally at Lake Leamy where the family would come and visit on Sundays.

“Back then, no need for a receptionist or an appointment to see the doctor. The maid or the children would meet the patients or take the calls, most of them requests for counsel on diseases. No Medicare card either. The doctor did his accounting himself and did not send any bills, counting on people's honesty. "If they don't come to pay me, he used to say, that's because they're not able to." When he died, his family found books full of unpaid accounts.

“On top of his daily work, Joseph-Urgel was a member of numerous professional associations. He joined the Medical Association of Hull County as Director, when it was founded in June 1901. In 1922, he was Governor of the Doctors and Surgeons College of the Province de Québec for District 13; he acted also as the Head-doctor for the

Union Saint-Joseph du Canada and was the local President of that society during 14 years. He was the President of the Medical Association of the Hull district, President of the Sanitary Congress of the Province of Québec in 1919-1921 and Examiner of the National Alliance and of many societies and insurance companies.

“Doctor and businessman, Doctor Archambault owned the drugstore Hull Medical Hall. [...]

“While he was building his clientele base, the young man thought about having a family of his own. On August 23, 1898, he married in Joliette Marie-Rose Olivier, daughter of Justice L.-A. Olivier, ex-Senator of Lanaudière. The couple had seven children (four died at a young age). The eldest, Olivier, born on July 18, 1902, returned to the family roots in Saint-Pierre-les-Becquets in 1927. [...] Tère-se, Marie Thérèse Rose Elmire, (great admirer of Tère-se d’Avila, she insisted her name be written that way, with no *h*), born on April 29, 1904, won fame by being the first secular woman in North America to obtain a Ph.D. in Scolastique Philosophy; she was granted a scholarship from the Province of Québec and studied at the École catholique de Bruxelles and in Paris. Marguerite, born on December 17, 1911, was married to Paul Ardouin.

“The doctor -who became a widow in 1925- remarried with Miss Albina Massé, sister of the mother-in-law of his daughter Marguerite. The father became the uncle of his daughter! The couple left the area from 1930 to 1935, and they came back to Hull where the doctor bought his last house at 17, Nicolet Street [...]. That's where he died at 69 years old, on September 12, 1941, after having suffered from a terrible disease during three years.

“A cheerful-natured person, this gentle and calm man, was extremely well read. He possessed a significant collection of books and liked to read anything and everything without having a favourite author. He liked newspapers also, *Le Devoir* among them. [...] he would not say no to a match of bridge, of whist or 500. He liked to travel and would attend regularly doctors' congresses and municipal congresses. [...]

“Doctor and businessman, we said? We find proof of that in the purchase of lots on chemin de la Montagne (Gamelin Blvd.) with some partners [...] grouped together under the name Compagnie d’amusement. At the time there were only a few summer cottages on these woody and shaded properties. The present day des Oliviers Street takes its name from this transaction from the beginning of the Century and should be called indeed Olivier, the last name of Mrs. Archambault.

“Son of a mayor — his father Damase-Eusèbe was mayor of Saint-Pierre-les-Becquets from 1876 to 1890 — grandson, on his mother’s side, of the MP of Nicolet, Antoine-Prosper Méthot, and son-in-law of Senator L.-A. Olivier who represented the district of Lanaudière, it would have been surprising that Urgel Archambault not be tempted by this drug that is politics, especially on a playground as vast as the third largest city of the Province. After having settled in, family wise and professionally, true to tradition, the 33 year-old doctor launched his political career.

“His political career was 25 years long. He was first municipal councillor [...] from 1905 to 1909. He left for a short time the municipal scene to become President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1910. [...]

“In 1911, *Le Spectateur*, a liberal newspaper, was very critical of his arrival on the political scene. When the doctor announced his candidacy to the mayor's office (that everybody thought reserved to the promoters Bourque and Dupuis), the newspaper wrote that it was "a manoeuvre from the Tories... Dr. Aubry". Bigger surprise yet: he wins against Bourque, with a 632 votes majority, majority unprecedented in the history of municipal politics. His victory was attributed to the support of Mr. Dupuis "who, having desired the mayor seat for a long time, helped Mr. Archambault" and to the support he got from a few members of the clergy".

“During the two following years, his old ally made him taste the bitterness of defeat. Hormidas Dupuis was elected mayor in 1912 and 1913 with 394 and 577 majorities. These successive failures prompted Archambault to wait for the right time and he wasn't a candidate at the 1914 election. He made a comeback in 1915, but his opponent from 1911, Bourque, won with a 108 votes majority.

“His persistence earned him the respect of the electors and they unanimously elected him mayor in 1916. He was then the champion of the Workers' Association, who succeeded in having all its candidates elected, a big victory.

“The population gave him a third mandate in 1918. This election was an animated affair, that could be called "the whisky election". It divided the city between the prohibitionists and the anti-prohibitionists. The referendum on prohibition took place in the spring of 1917, and the following administration, who was elected in January 1918, had to bring into force the teetotaler decision of the Hullois. Helped by the newspaper *Le Droit* was convinced they had "to purge the city from the devilish alcohol" and curé Bernier who, up into the pulpit, described the desired candidate, Archambault had an easy triumph par 415 votes against the lawyer Louis Cousineau.

“Elected mayor for two years, he waited until 1928 to be a candidate again, when Théodore Lambert defeated him by 1387 votes; it was the end of his political career. [...]

“His most important endeavours took place in his four year mandate, from 1916 to 1920. He can be proud that he was the president of the subscription campaign "Victory bonds" in the Hull district, to have been the host of the Prince of Wales in September 1919 and of the General Governor, the Duke of Devonshire, but Mayor Archambault is better known as the Frenchifyer of Hull.

“Since 1909, the Chamber of Commerce encouraged the municipal Council to revise the names of the streets that still bore English names. [...] The municipal Council put together in 1911 a special committee to revise the street names. Dr. Archambault was sent as a delegate by the municipal Council. The committee recommended in its July 1912 report to change the name of 45 streets, including 10 as soon as 1912. The change was supposed to happen gradually, but it's only four years later, once Dr. Archambault was back in the mayor's chair, that a new committee changed the name of 69 streets, giving them names *historically meaningful enough to commemorate the great names and great History events of the French and English Regimes*.

“The special interest that the mayor took to that cause is obvious. He was responsible for the name of Olivier for the street crossing the one bearing his name. We wonder if the Lanaudière Street in Val-Tétréau (name of the district where his father-in-law was Senator), and Nicolet Street in Wrightville (of the county that his grand-father represented at the Parliament), owe him their names also. [...]

“The support that the Workers' Association granted him in 1916 resulted in his efforts - in March 1919- before the provincial government for the construction of the École technique (Technical School). Sign of his tenacity, they followed the efforts started in June 1916 with the spokesperson of the Workers' Association, Achille Morin. They led to the foundation of the school in 1924, at the time when ironically Hull experimented a decline in its industrial calling. The Hullois owe him the École technique. Although not completed during his mandate, it was founded thanks to his work and the work of Achille Morin. [...]

“This article only skims over the personage that is Dr. Archambault, but we hope it produces more in-depth texts on local history. At the very least, people from Hull will now know what is the origin of Archambault Street.”

Denise Latrémouille

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