



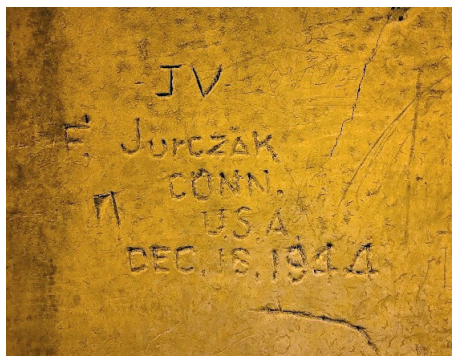
Épernay, October 5, 2026

82 YEARS AFTER THE LIBERATION OF ÉPERNAY, THE CHILDREN OF AN AMERICAN SOLDIER REDISCOVER THEIR FATHER'S TRACE IN THE CELLARS OF CHAMPAGNE GOSSET.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF INVESTIGATION, A NAME CARVED INTO THE CHALK OF THE CHAMPAGNE GOSSET CELLARS FINALLY HAS A FACE: THAT OF FRANK JURCZAK, A 20-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO LEFT HIS SIGNATURE THERE IN 1944.

ON OCTOBER 5, 2026, HIS CHILDREN SUSAN AND RICHARD IN TURN DISCOVER THE TRACE THEIR FATHER LEFT 82 YEARS EARLIER.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2026: RICHARD JURCZAK AND HIS SISTER SUSAN CARLSON, ACCOMPANIED BY THEIR SPOUSES AND CHILDREN, DISCOVER WITH EMOTION THE GRAFFITI CARVED BY THEIR FATHER AND GRANDFATHER IN THE CHAMPAGNE GOSSET CELLARS ON DECEMBER 16, 1944.



*« F. JURCZAK, CONN., USA, DEC 16, 1944 »,
Gosset cellars*

THE STORY BEGINS AT THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THE CITY OF ÉPERNAY WAS LIBERATED IN AUGUST 1944 BY THE U.S. ARMY'S 7TH ARMORED DIVISION, COMMANDED BY GENERAL PATTON. SERGEANT FRANK STANLEY JURCZAK, THEN 20 YEARS OLD, WAS IN CHAMPAGNE WITH HIS UNIT, THE 129TH ORDNANCE BOMB DISPOSAL SQUAD, TASKED WITH BOMB DISPOSAL AND THE NEUTRALIZATION OF EXPLOSIVES.

DURING HIS STAY, HE CARVED INTO THE CHALK OF CHAMPAGNE CELLARS DATING FROM THE 19TH CENTURY, NEAR OTHER GRAFFITI FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR DEPICTING A BAYONET, EIFFEL TOWERS AND FLAGS, THE INSCRIPTION "F. JURCZAK, CONN., USA, DEC 16 1944". THE DATE, THE MENTION "USA" AND THE REFERENCE TO THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT LEAVE NO DOUBT AS TO THE WRITER'S ORIGINS. YET THE SOLDIER'S IDENTITY AND STORY REMAINED UNKNOWN... UNTIL NOW.

FROM 1944 TO 2023, “JURCZAK” WAS SIMPLY A NAME CARVED INTO THE CHALK. IN 2026, IT HAS A FACE AGAIN.

IN 2021, AS PART OF ITS MISSION TO PRESERVE AND PASS ON ITS EXPERTISE AND HERITAGE, CHAMPAGNE GOSSET CALLED ON HISTORIANS TO RECONSTRUCT THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC ÉPERNAY ESTATE, WHERE IT HAS BEEN BASED SINCE 2009, AND TO CATALOGUE, DECIPHER AND DATE THE HUNDREDS OF GRAFFITI INSCRIBED ON THE WALLS OF ITS 1.7 KM OF CELLARS.

THESE ARE HISTORICAL TRACES OF LIFE IN THE CELLARS AND WITNESSES TO THE GREAT HISTORY UNFOLDING ABOVE GROUND: PICKELHAUBE HELMETS AND DATES FROM THE 1870S; ECHOES OF THE GREAT WAR, WITH FRENCH SOLDIERS KNOWN AS POILUS CARVING THEIR NAMES, DATES OF BIRTH OR SERVICE NUMBERS; TRACES OF CHAMPAGNE PRODUCTION AND CELLAR WORK (BOTTLE COUNTS, DRAWINGS OF RIDDLING RACKS, BUNCHES OF GRAPES, GLASSES...); AND NUMEROUS NAMES, INCLUDING “JURCZAK”, AS THE MAISON’S EMPLOYEES CALL IT, AND THE AREA THEY REFER TO AS “THE AMERICAN’S CELLAR”. THE RESEARCH INITIALLY PROVED UNSUCCESSFUL.



*Poilu, First World War,
Gosset cellars*

IN OCTOBER 2023, A STROKE OF LUCK SETS THE INVESTIGATION IN MOTION AND ULTIMATELY LEADS TO THE SOLDIER’S FULL IDENTITY. A FEW MONTHS EARLIER, AMERICAN VISITORS HAD ALREADY MENTIONED THAT THEY CAME FROM CONNECTICUT AND THAT THE SURNAME JURCZAK WAS RELATIVELY COMMON THERE, REVIVING HOPE OF FINDING A LEAD.

THEN, A GROUP OF AMERICAN VISITORS FROM NEW ORLEANS, ACCOMPANIED BY A COUPLE OF WINE MERCHANTS WHO ARE GREAT ENTHUSIASTS OF CHAMPAGNE GOSSET, WHICH THEY DISTRIBUTE LOCALLY (JANE COOPER AND BOB HEAPS – GRANDE KREWE), OPENS THE WAY TO A POSSIBLE SOLUTION. ON ARRIVING IN THE “AMERICAN’S CELLAR”, NATHALIE DUFOUR, HOSPITALITY MANAGER AND RESPONSIBLE FOR WELCOMING VIPs AND PROFESSIONALS AT CHAMPAGNE GOSSET, EXPLAINS THAT DESPITE THE RESEARCH ALREADY UNDERTAKEN, NO INFORMATION HAD BEEN FOUND ABOUT THE SOLDIER.

ONE OF THE GROUP’S MEMBERS, BRIAN ACE, THEN EXPLAINS THAT NEW ORLEANS IS HOME TO A MUSEUM DEDICATED TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR, WHICH PROVIDES ACCESS TO A DATABASE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND WHOSE DIRECTOR HAPPENS TO BE A FRIEND OF HIS. NATHALIE AND BOB AGREE THAT, ONCE BACK HOME, HE WILL CARRY OUT FURTHER RESEARCH.

THE NEWS COMES ON JANUARY 5, 2024: BRIAN ACE HAS FOUND THE SON OF THE GRAFFITI'S AUTHOR. BOB WRITES TO NATHALIE: "IT IS RICHARD JURCZAK (...), HIS FATHER, FRANK JURCZAK, ORIGINALLY FROM NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT, WAS IN FRANCE AT THAT TIME. (...) HE SENT ME A MESSAGE THIS MORNING TO TELL ME THAT HE HAD JUST REALIZED THAT DECEMBER 16 WAS HIS FATHER'S BIRTHDAY. THANK YOU FOR PRESERVING THIS UNIQUE TESTIMONY TO AMERICAN HISTORY."

ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, A COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE IS UNVEILED BY RICHARD JURCZAK AND SUSAN CARLSON, WITH A SPECIAL THOUGHT FOR THEIR BROTHER FRANK JUNIOR, WHO PASSED AWAY FAR TOO SOON. IT WILL BE INSTALLED IN THE GOSSET CELLARS NEAR FRANK JURCZAK'S GRAFFITI.

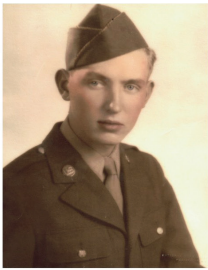
THE FRANK JURCZAK STORY

The identity of the person behind this graffiti remained unknown until the visit of a group of Americans from New Orleans in October 2023, which marked the beginning of the investigation.

Brian Ace, one of the visitors, was intrigued by the inscription and began researching it upon his return to the United States.

Working closely with Nathalie Dufour, Hospitality Manager at the House, he contacted the National WWII Museum.

A few months later, he succeeded in tracing Frank Jurczak's son, Richard. His subsequent exchanges with Nathalie helped shed light, more than 80 years later, on the story behind this remarkable testimony preserved in stone.



SPECIAL THANKS TO JANE COOPER AND BOB HEAPS, WINE MERCHANTS IN NEW ORLEANS, WHO INTRODUCED US TO BRIAN ACE, THE INVESTIGATOR BEHIND THIS STORY.



Frank Stanley Jurczak, of Polish descent, was born on December 16, 1924, and lived his entire life in New Britain, Connecticut. During the Second World War, he served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army's 129th Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad, notably in northern France, the Rhineland and Central Europe.



After being discharged in January 1946, he studied mechanical engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute before spending his entire career at Pratt & Whitney, specializing in jet engine technology. He passed away in 1982, leaving behind his wife and their three children.

THIS GRAFFITI WAS CARVED INTO THE WALLS OF OUR CELLARS DURING HIS TIME IN CHAMPAGNE IN 1944.



PLAQUE UNVEILED ON OCTOBER 5, 2026, ON THE OCCASION OF RICHARD JURCZAK'S VISIT.

The commemorative plaque unveiled on October 5, 2026

ABOUT CHAMPAGNE GOSSET:

GOSSET IS THE OLDEST CHAMPAGNE WINE HOUSE: IT WAS FOUNDED IN Aÿ IN 1584. ONE CENTURY EARLIER, JEAN GOSSET WAS ALREADY MAKING STILL RED WINES; IN 1531, HIS CELLARS STOOD NEXT TO THOSE PURCHASED BY FRANÇOIS I IN THE SAME VILLAGE. THE GOSSET NAME REPRESENTS SEVEN CENTURIES OF HISTORY, AND THE MAISON, WHICH HAS REMAINED FAMILY-OWNED AND INDEPENDENT, IS THE ONLY ONE TO BE BOTH A MEMBER OF L'EXCELLENCE FRANÇAISE AND THE HOLDER OF THE FRENCH STATE'S "ENTREPRISE DU PATRIMOINE VIVANT" (LIVING HERITAGE COMPANY) LABEL. IT IS PART OF THE HILLSIDES, HOUSES AND CELLARS OF CHAMPAGNE, INSCRIBED ON UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST.

SET WITHIN A ONE-HECTARE PARK LISTED BY THE CITY, WITH A CHAMPAGNE BAR AND SHADED TERRACE, CHAMPAGNE GOSSET OFFERS CELLAR TOURS, TASTINGS AND BESPOKE PRIVATE EVENTS.

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PHOTO CREDITS: CHAMPAGNE GOSSET / JURCZAK FAMILY COLLECTION.