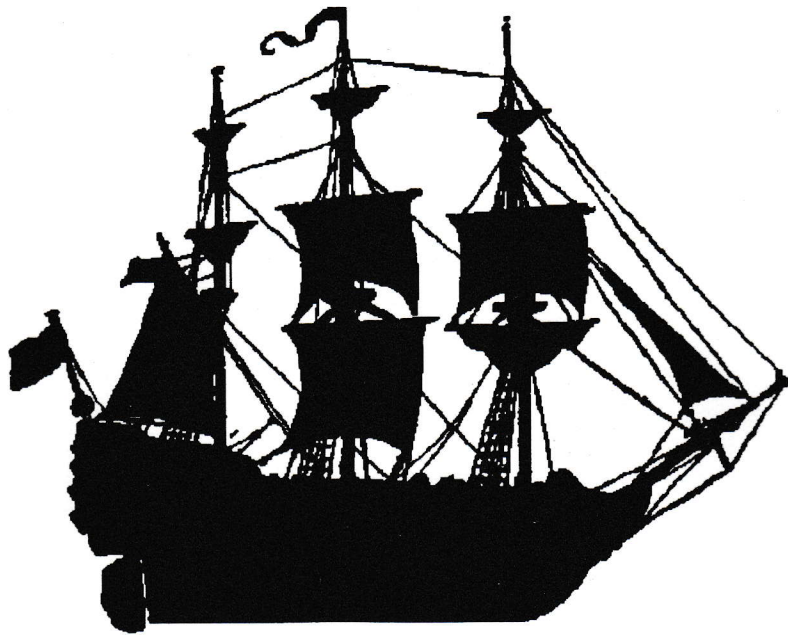


# CHAPTER ONE

## Historical Overview

*Early history and background information  
The race to develop New France  
Economic system and customs*



### INTRODUCTION AND PREAMBLE

Before one can start to tell the story of a family which spans a period of some 350 years, the author should try to put the reader in the proper perspective. Writing about one's family is more than listing birth, marriage and death dates. One should come to know and actually feel for the family members and the lives they led. In order to properly do that, the reader has to be made aware of, and perhaps even be placed in, the period in which the events took place and the conditions under which the ancestors lived. In order to do that, one has to be made aware of conditions in the world of the late 1500s and the early 1600s.

## HISTORICAL EVENTS<sup>1</sup>

- 1>1542 Ordered by the King of France, Jean Francois de La Rocque de Roberval is sent to Canada to found a colony and spread Catholicism. Jacques Cartier returns to France with what he believes are diamonds but are really quartz stones. Thus the French phrase "Faux comme un diamant du Canada" which means "As Faulty (or foolish) as a diamond from Canada".
- 2>1576 The English navigator, Martin Frobisher, discovers the bay in Canada which carries his name.
- 3>1581 Merchants in St-Malo, Rouen and Dieppe organize expeditions to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in search of fur.
- 4>1583 Etienne Bellenger, a Rouen merchant, returns to France with furs which realize a tenfold profit for him.
- 5>1584 Malouin merchants (from St-Malo) equip five merchant ships for fur trading along the St Lawrence. They are so successful that they re-double the number of ships.
- 6>1600 Francois Grave du Pont and Captain Pierre de Chauvin de Tonnetuit establish Tadoussac, fur trading post with the Montagnais.
- 7>1604 Pierre Du Gua de Monts and Champlain explore Acadia. Port Royal is founded.
- 8>1606 Baron Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt & de St-Just becomes first commandant of Port Royal, the first settlement in Acadia.
- 9>1607 Jamestown is founded. First English settlement in North America.
- 10>1608 Founding of Quebec by Champlain on 3 July. Construction of l'Abitation will shelter 28 men. During the winter, 20 of the 28 men die.
- 11>1609 Champlain's ships return to France. Men are weakened from lack of food and from scurvy. Champlain has signed a treaty with the Huron nation. Canada is referred to as New France for the first time.
- 12>1612 Francois Bellanger is born of Francois Bellanger and Francoise Horlays in Normandy, France. Champlain becomes lieutenant of New France.
- 13>1614 Founding of the Company of Merchants for the purpose of establishing a fur trade monopoly in New France.
- 14>1617 Louis Hebert is the 1st permanent settler in New France.
- 15>1618 Champlain sends a memo to Louis XIII, outlining his vision of a French colony centered around Quebec.
- 16>1620 Pilgrims land in Massachusetts.
- 17>1624 Marie Guyon, future wife of Francois Bellanger, is born in France.
- 18>1627 The population of New France is now about one hundred; ten are women.
- 19>1628 Settlers in Quebec are starving. On 27 April, oxen are first used to plow soil in Canada.
- 20>1638 Nicolas Bellanger is born. Exactly to whom, where and when; you will have to decide after reading the story of Francois and Nicolas.

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<sup>1</sup> From the "Timetables of History", by Bernard Grun, published by Touchstone, 1982 and "Chronologie du Quebec" by Jean Provencher and published by Boreal, Quebec, 1991.



## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW<sup>2</sup>

The area around the Gulf of St Lawrence and the land bordering the St Lawrence River were claimed by Jacques Cartier for France after his expeditions in 1534 to the Gaspé Peninsula and in 1535 to present day Montreal. This was not the start of the exploration of New France and Canada, however. French fisherman from Normandy had previously come to fish the Canadian and New England coasts on an annual basis. Since these trips were not considered exploratory, little is officially recorded of them. We find that by 1506 these annual fishing excursions had become commonplace when Jean Denys of Honfleur and Gamart of Rouen recorded their trip. The harbor of Brest was named in honor of the Breton port by Captain Thomas Aubert of Dieppe in 1508 when he landed there in his ship, the *Pensee*. The establishment of this port soon attracted settlers and it grew into a city of over 200 homes with a year-round population of over 1000 in the winter and three times that much in the summer. Jacques Cartier made three historic voyages to New France and was responsible for opening a reliable path between the new continent and France. He fully explored the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1534 and made an unsuccessful attempt at colonizing the area. He also traveled down the east coast of the continent and, by 1565, had failed at his attempts to establish colonies in Florida. This exploration and travel set the background for other important explorers and by 1600 we find others making the trip across the Atlantic.

Samuel de Champlain crossed the Atlantic twenty nine times between 1600 and 1633 and was responsible for the official recording and charting of much of the New England and New France sea-coast. He helped establish small clusters of residents in Saco Bay, Maine, Boston Bay and even Plymouth, Massachusetts which he had named Port St Louis 15 years before the arrival of the pilgrims. It is said that the Spanish who were developing Florida and other southern areas visited New France much earlier and had found nothing worth exploring. They are supposed to have sent back word to Spain that "a, ca nada" which translated means, "there, there is nothing" which is one of the possible origins of the name Canada.

The French colony of New France started growing with the influx of people from Europe after the establishment of the first village in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain at Quebec City. In 1609 he gave his name to a large lake in Vermont that he found there. Encouraged by King Louis XIV of France, and funded by prominent men such as Jean Talon and the Comte de Frontenac (governor from 1672 to 1682), more than 10,000 immigrants arrived in the 150 years of the French regime. The 7,000 who stayed, cleared the land, established schools, churches, and industries, explored westward, and extended the fur trade. A pseudo feudal system (seigneurial system) developed in which the Catholic church played a major role.

By 1750 the population had reached some 65,000. This was certainly attributed to the large family sizes predominant in French families of the day. British and French conflicts in Europe naturally promoted long conflicts over authority in America which was largely responsible for the French and Indian Wars. In 1759 the British General James Wolfe finally defeated the Marquis de Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham and captured Quebec City. The fall of Montreal followed in September of 1760 and this ended the hostilities. The 1763 Treaty of Paris required that France give up all of New France to British rule.

The result was that New France was no longer tied to France and suddenly became part of the British Empire. New colonists were now coming from Britain, and, after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, from America. Britain continued to colonize New France through the

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<sup>2</sup>An overview gleaned from the Groliers Encyclopedia.



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Quebec Act of 1774, the Constitutional Act of 1791, and the British North America Act of 1867 (when Quebec joined Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into the Confederation of Canada). During this change, French speaking inhabitants were allowed to retain their native language, their religion and their system of civil government.

The French kept the upper hand in agriculture and far outnumbered the English speaking population in Canada. In the early 1800s the English (les Anglais) had started to develop lumber, paper, mining, textile, and other industries. They established commercial, financial, and trading companies, many of which were centered in Montreal. The French accounted for 80 percent of the population but the English controlled the economic structures of the province although the French did continue to dominate politically. French Quebecers resented their lowly position, and in 1837 Louis Papineau led an unsuccessful revolt.

World War I and II increased the rate of modernization and brought about many questions of continued traditional ways. Successive Quebec governments enacted legislation to achieve greater control of social and economic policies. Although the government wanted to do this while maintaining the existing Canadian Confederation, they continually found renewed sentiment for the complete independence of Quebec. In 1976 the Parti Quebecois, led by Rene Levesque, which advocated the formation of a separate sovereign state, was elected. In 1980, Quebec voters soundly defeated a referendum proposal that would have split Quebec from Canada. Levesque resigned in 1985, and his party later lost the provincial election to the Liberals. During the Liberal tenure a 1988 law proclaiming the exclusive use of French on outdoor signs was passed after Canada's Supreme Court had struck down earlier similar legislation.

Following various unsuccessful efforts to resolve federal-provincial differences that stopped Quebec from signing the Constitution Act of 1982, a strong independence movement emerged once again by the late 1980s. In October 1992, Quebec was among the provinces that rejected (and thus killed) another constitutional unity plan. Parti Quebecois leader Jacques Parizeau won a narrow victory over Liberal premier Daniel Johnson on 12 September 1994, and promised to hold a referendum on independence in 1995. This 1995 referendum was narrowly defeated by 0.1% and Jacques Parizeau resigned. Lucien Bouchard, the separatist leader, led the effort for independence and promised to try again in two years.

## THE WAY IT WAS

Our ancestors originated from France; and that fact is certainly not disputed. In the very early 1600s, feudalism flourished in France. Feudalism was a system where the noble rich owned the land and lived off their tenant farmers. The farmers were peasants who tended small plots of land conceded to them by their Lord and Master (the Seigneur) who was rich and powerful and usually lived in a grand chateau. This made for two classes of people, the rich and the poor, with very little middle ground. Women could not marry without a dowry and Catholicism was the only religion tolerated. Non Catholics were persecuted and discriminated against and religion played an important part in the lives of all inhabitants. This was the era for many religious wars between Catholics and the Huguenots which fed the spread of a new religion called Calvinism with its Calvinist followers. Many of the French were looking for a new and better way of life, even if that meant taking a dangerous voyage of over three months across an ocean that claimed many a life on the journey. The appeal of a new start and an opportunity to own the land one farmed was stronger than the fears of the voyage and the Indians on the other end, for many. Small groups found their way to New France and used differing reasons for doing it.



## LOOKING WESTWARD

When King Henry IV came to power he found himself with a France that was plagued with poverty, desolation, religious turmoil and official corruption. He managed to turn France into a nation that was not only orderly and prosperous but one that was powerful enough to challenge Spain who held land surrounding France. This success even allowed him to fund the exploration and colonization of Canada. Peace was not the order of the day, however, and the fighting between the Catholics and Huguenots continued. In 1610 King Henry IV was assassinated and this left the country in disorder and chaos. One would have expected France to be doomed when, in 1614, 8 year old King Louis XIII succeeded King Henry. Clashes between the Catholics and Protestants were renewed, Protestant services were disrupted, Protestant churches and homes destroyed and children were forcibly taken from their parents on the grounds that the parents prevented them from "fulfilling their desire" to become Catholics. Influenced by the Pope, King Louis XIII ordered the Huguenots to restore all property that they had appropriated from the Church. You can just imagine how this did not sit well with the Huguenots. Louis brought the Huguenot realm under his direct personal rule and, in 1621 at the age of 15, he led an army against the Protestant citadels. In 1624 Cardinal Richelieu had been prime minister and influencing the actions of King Louis for eight years. Richelieu's objectives were the subduing of the Huguenots, the nobles, and of Spain. Richelieu wanted to ensure that New France had none of the French turmoil which he blamed on the differences between Catholics and non-Catholics. In 1625, Richelieu was so convinced that such conflict would ruin New France that, he ordered that only Catholics would be allowed to migrate to Canada.<sup>3</sup> King Louis XIII supported him in this edict. As you may imagine, Richelieu was so influential with a young King Louis that he may as well have held the office of King himself. It seemed that whatever Richelieu wanted, the King supported. This influence is evident in many of the decisions made with regards to government and the laws passed in New France as well as the distaste for Frenchmen taking on Indian wives (and often forgetting to actually marry them).

## THE RACE TO DEVELOP THE NEW CONTINENT

England was developing the Atlantic seacoast of the new continent much faster than the French were occupying New France. England was surrounding the French with the thirteen colonies along the coast, settlements in Newfoundland and those in Hudson Bay. British fishermen and traders successfully competed with the French in their struggle for fish and furs. Britain and France were continually looking for reasons to generate conflict and this competition over fish and fur was reason enough. New England accepted immigrants from all walks of life while one had to be of good character to migrate into New France.

Many businessmen professed humanitarian reasons existed for the efforts made to populate New France but, at least until 1617, most of the settlers in New France were brought there to exploit the fur trade. Louis Hebert, a farmer and the first true colonist, arrived at Quebec with his wife and children to establish a farm. Thus, 1617 marked the first real home for a farming family and the discovery that European plants like cabbages, radishes and lettuce were well suited to the climate. Because more settlers were needed, the race to bring French settlers, by whatever means, to New France was on! King Louis was not to be outdone by the English and gave great consideration to any and all plans presented to him which might escalate the settlements in the new country. He was looking to get his share of the fur trade even to the point of allowing farmers to settle in the new country.

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<sup>3</sup>The Huguenot Heritage by Donald Chaput, ACGS #2867, ACGS Journal Vol. 18, Nr. 4 Issue 54, Fall 1992.



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In order to entice the French to migrate to New France, concessions of land were guaranteed to those willing to clear the land and settle there. The first such concession was made on 4 February 1623 when the Duke of Montmorency, Viceroy of New France, granted Louis Hebert a farm at the edge of the fortified camp of Quebec. That is why 1623 is the year recognized as the founding of New France.

Until the English conquest in 1763, the French people lived under the laws and customs of the French regime. These French laws were called the "Coutume de Paris". New France gave its settlers a huge country of raw, wild Indian lands which had been easily taken after the Indian population had been decimated by European diseases such as smallpox. The surviving Indians had been driven back into small settlements such as St Francois du Lac, Chagnawaga, Sillery and Batiscan.

### **THE COMPANY OF 100 ASSOCIATES 1627-1663**

With all his efforts, King Louis was concerned that the population of New England was still growing much faster than that of New France. He was under constant pressure from his chief representative in the new country, Champlain, to send more settlers. King Louis needed a faster way to colonize the new country which made him receptive to a new idea presented to him by a group called "The Hundred Associates" (Les Cent Associes). In 1627 a group of 100 French merchants and nobles was formed by Cardinal Richelieu, the King's chief minister and the most powerful man in France. The Company was given all rights to the fur trade in New France and, in return, they were charged with the responsibility of bringing other settlers, like Louis Hebert, to New France and to support them for three years. They had a quota, in the first year, of two to three hundred settlers and men representing all the trades needed to establish a community. For the first three years, the Company needed to ensure that these settlers were fed, had lodging and had enough grain to plant their first crop. Acting like the salesmen they were, the founders of The Company, composed of merchants and high nobles of the French court, promised to bring the colonies up to a population of four thousand within fifteen years. This turned out to be an empty promise as they were using the King's desire to settle and populate the new land to further their main purpose of exploiting the fur trade in North America. Beaver pelts were bringing high prices in Europe and fortunes could be made in furs. The King thought this was the answer to settling and developing New France so he granted this company total monopoly rights over all the land and everything on it in what is now Canada and the United States west of the Allegheny Mountains. At that time, New France covered not only the Canada of today but most of the United States too.

The project seemed doomed from the start. Before the first three years were even up (in 1629), the English took over the colonies and put quite a damper into the efforts that had so recently started. It wasn't until 1632 that this project got back on track again. The two families that really got things going were the Giffard and the Juchereau families. The settlement effort got a strong foothold when these two prominent families intermarried. Two daughters in the Giffard family married two Juchereau brothers and this combined quite a bit of property. The boundary lines later needed adjustment to accommodate the establishment of the City of Quebec.

The Company could not be bothered with the task of importing settlers for farming, and in order to devote themselves to the fur trade, they devised a scheme to appease the King and Richelieu. They granted large tracts of land (seigneuries) to a few notables (not nobles) with the understanding that they would bring settlers from France and concede land to them for the cultivation of crops and the establishment of homesteads. Wasn't this the proverbial "passing the buck" if there ever was one! These notables were Frenchmen who were rather better educated than the average, knew how to read



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and write and showed some promise to be able to fulfill The Company's charge. This would credit The Company with bringing the settlers over without their actually doing it themselves. It seemed to be a "win-win" situation for everyone.

## LAND GRANTS - (SEIGNEURIES)

The Company's first "seigneurie" (a large grant of land sometimes referred to as a Fief) was granted to Robert Giffard in 1634. Seigneur is the french word for lord and the land owned by one such lord was a seigneurie. The King had stipulated that the land was to be granted to meritorious individuals as farms and seigneurial land grants. The conditions of the grant were that the settlers Giffard brought to New France would be credited to The Company's account. Over the next 30 years The Company granted some 70 such seigneuries, most of which had the same clause in the deed of title.

Robert Giffard was probably the most active Seigneur in the history of Canada. He went back to France and brought several influential settlers back to farm rotures (small parcels of land for farming as a tenant farmer within the seigneurie) on his Seigneurie de Beaupre. He granted large tracts of land to others who subsequently became seigneurs themselves. It was with Robert Giffard that Francois Bellanger came to New France in 1637. Francois came, as part of those who migrated with the Hundred Associates, which made our Bélanger family involved in the development of New France right from the beginning. Our family's story really starts at this time in the history of New France.

These grants varied greatly in size from a dozen square miles to as much as one hundred square miles. They were called "seigneuries" and some were large enough to grant a sub seigneurie ("arriere fief") to another seigneur. This arriere fief was a grant by the senior seigneur and not from the King. Although not rich, these seigneurs were very influential and powerful people, respected by other settlers and generally were more educated, being able to read and write. They were usually in charge of the local militia.

Louis Hebert was the first Canadian Seigneur (he received his grant from the governor at Quebec). The ceremony of granting a seigneurie was interesting. One would kneel on one knee before the governor at Quebec and make an oath of loyalty to the King and promised obedience. Although paying no money, he was expected to divide his seigneurie into farms for tenant farmers "habitants" and ensure that it was cleared for farming. Although the farmer had to build a home, clear and farm the land (called a roture), the Seigneur had to build a mill to process the crops.

An explanation of some words used in this writing might aid in understanding the text. Some words have either changed their meaning over the years or have been dropped from use. An example of this is the word "Arpent". If you know 20th century French you would say Arpent meant Acre but in 1620 it was only 7/8 of today's acre and was also used to signify lineal length of frontage. When using these words that do not translate directly into 20th century American, the original French word will be used. Please refer to the end of this chapter to obtain a better understanding of these words and the monetary system.

The seigneurs, in turn, were required to concede land to colonists for farming and to establish homesteads. These colonists were called "censitaires" or "habitants" and their farms were called "rotures". Some seigneuries were just a few arpents in or near the villages and others were many square miles along the rivers. The rotures also were of various sizes with some being a few arpents while others were hundreds of arpents. The average roture, however, was from 40 to 80 arpents with very few over 100. A farmer was well off with an 80 arpent roture along the St Lawrence River. This gave



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him a place for a home next to the river, which was his only highway to market. He would clear 20 to 40 arpents for crops and the remaining wood was used for heating and building a home. The rotures usually had a narrow frontage on the river and extended deep into the woods away from the river. They looked like the spaces between spokes on a wheel with the river being the hub. A row of rectangular rotures, with the short side on the same river or road, was called a "rang".

The seigneur would annually collect a tax "cens" from his censitaires which was a small token payment based on the size of the roture. He also collected rent ("rente") which was also based on the size of the roture. The censitaire paid the seigneur a half dozen chickens or some grain each year and usually about three days' work on the seigneur's land. The censitaires would all get together, in the fall, at the seigneur's house to pay their rente and participate in dancing, singing and enjoying the hospitality of the seigneur. The seigneur received "banality" which was a charge levied for a service rendered to the censitaire. Such a banality was the one bag of grain the seigneur received for every 16 the censitaire grew and brought to the grist mill for grinding.

If the censitaire sold his roture to anyone other than a relative or in his direct line of succession, he had to pay the seigneur one twelfth of the selling price. This was referred to as "lodes et ventes". If the Seigneur did not agree with the sale of the roture, (this, only if it was sold to anyone who was not a descendant of the censitaire), the seigneur had the right to purchase it from the buyer for the same price the buyer had paid for it. This was called "retrait roturier" (retrieving the roture) and the buyer had no say in the matter, as long as this happened within a reasonable amount of time. A descendant of the seller, in the same manner, could purchase his family's roture from a "non relative purchaser" within a specified amount of time. This legal practice was called "retrait lignager" (retrieving one's ancestral land). Again, the "non relative purchaser" had no say in the matter.

The startup costs for the seigneur, to set up a seigneurie, were high. He had to pay to have his land surveyed, had to clear his own land and build a home. He was also required to build a grist mill to grind the grain of his censitaires. In order to just break even, he needed at least 25 censitaires working his land. If he got up to 50 censitaires he was living well and if he had 100 he was considered wealthy. Few seigneurs ever got that big and most lived no better than their censitaires. French settlers comprised about 75% of the population and most were farmers who were content to farm their land and raise their families in peace and freedom. Between the wars with the Iroquois and with the English, there was not much time of peace and freedom.

## THE IROQUOIS

By 1640 the Iroquois Indians nearly caused the early demise of New France with their attacks on the French colonies. The low population of about four hundred settlers and about three hundred soldiers was attributed to the scourge of the Iroquois. One Jesuit wrote, "I had as lief be beset by goblins as by the Iroquois, the one are about as visible as the other." The Iroquois were encouraged at the devastation they could cause with the abundant supply of guns and steel weapons which they were getting from the Dutch. The Dutch had settled the northern territory called Hudson's Bay and supplied the Indians with modern weapons in exchange for furs. The Iroquois were no longer restricted by their bows, arrows and wicker shields.

This made the Iroquois better armed than the settlers and the other Indian tribes. The very things that made the Iroquois such an ominous force finally lead to their ultimate defeat. They became a people with a completely changed way of life and no longer were able to survive without the white man's weapons, blankets and metal utensils. They became dependent on trading which meant they eventually needed to trade with the French as well as the Dutch. In order to obtain furs, the Iroquois



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preyed on other Indian tribes and soon had the Indian nation, as well as the French settlers, against them.

During this period, the Jesuit order was determined to bring religion to the Huron nation. They worked, tirelessly, to establish many settlements of Huron Indians where they could indoctrinate them in their religion. On 4 July 1648 the Iroquois attacked a well fortified settlement, broke through the fortifications and entered Father Daniel's church of St Joseph which was full of worshippers. They then attacked another fortification nearby and ended their massacre with nearly seven hundred prisoners, most of which they killed. These settlements were mostly comprised of Huron and, with more attacks by the Iroquois, the next year brought the demise of the Huron nation. Thus ended the short history of Huronia and caused the closing of the Jesuit settlements.

The Iroquois scourge continued into the 18th century, in one form or another. There is the story of Malobiannah, a captured Mohawk squaw. The Iroquois captured settlement after settlement and there seemed to be no way to stop them. This spread even to the settlements around what we now know as Madawaska (Indian name meaning porcupine) in northern Maine. Having invaded a fortification and captured Malobiannah and Necomah (the Mohawk chief's wife) the Iroquois wanted to go on to conquer other Indian settlements to the South, along the St John River.

They held Necomah (who died during the night) and Malobiannah as hostages and planned to use them as guides to the other villages because they were not familiar with the southern territory. With a tremendous determination for revenge and in her desire to protect neighboring settlements, Malobiannah easily led the band of invading Iroquois to their deaths (and hers as well) when she led them directly over the falls (Grand Falls) during the night. It is rumored that one of the attackers asked about the roaring sound ahead when she unhesitatingly said it was another branch of the river emptying into the St John. By the time the Iroquois discovered her plan, it was too late.

## TROIS RIVIERES

By 1634, the westward expansion caused by the far reaching fur trade caused the founding of Trois Rivieres (Three Rivers). Although only a deep woods outpost, Three Rivers held much promise for the future and, as we now know, this certainly did turn out to be true. Trois Rivieres became a place where Indians and French met to swap furs for European goods. The Iroquois found how lucrative the fur trade could be and became natural middle men between the French of Quebec and the other Indian tribes to the north and west. Thus an uneasy alliance came to exist between the French and Indians which was held together by a strong bond based on business survival. Furs were gathered from the Huron, Algonquin, Ojibwa, Montagnais, Andastes, Malecites and Abenakis as well as the Micmacs of Acadia. From here, many explorations of the country were made by navigating the rivers. One explorer traveled the Susquehanna until he reached salt water at what is today Chesapeake Bay. One can hardly imagine, today, how such exploration could be accomplished by canoe. More explorations took place to Lake Huron, which was called the Sweet Water Sea, and to Green Bay up the Fox River and all the way down to New Orleans on the Mississippi. These searchers for new fur sources were called "coureurs de bois" or runners of the woods. This term was applied to anyone who went West to trap furs for extended periods of time. Many coureurs-de-bois did not die from attacks by indians but from strangulation.

Portage is a French name for "carry" and it was used to indicate where the coureur-de-bois had to carry his load and canoe around obstacles to travel in the river. There were as many as forty of these portages between Fort St Marie Ontario and Quebec City. Since a typical load for a canoe was forty bundles of furs, each weighing one hundred pounds, there was quite a bit of work involved at a



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portage. A leather thong was strapped around the forehead and the bundles were carried on one's back while tied to the leather thong. The canoe was carried in similar fashion, with one end over the head while the other was dragged. This resulted in many hernias which, when untreated, led to the eventual strangulation of the coureur.

## MONTREAL

The founding of Montreal, in 1642, came about by an interesting set of events. Lying at the junction of the St Lawrence and the Ottawa Rivers, it was clear that Montreal was to be a major player in providing a central point for inland navigation. The desire of several religious leaders to convert the Indians brought about the settlement of this island in the deep woods, not its promise for commerce. Their leader, the Sieur<sup>4</sup> de Maisonneuve, a veteran soldier, raised money and with forty men and four women dared to attempt a settlement that far West of Quebec. On 8 May 1642 they left Quebec in a "pinnace" (a flat bottomed raft type of vessel), a barge and two row boats. It took them ten days of river travel to reach their destination. On the evening of their arrival, they caught fireflies, which were in abundance, and tied them with threads to make strings of lights which they used to adorn an altar they had quickly erected. Satisfied that they had done their homage to God, they posted guards, pitched their tents and lit their fires before settling in for the night.

For the next 22 years Maisonneuve was Montreal's Governor. Jeanne Mance, one of the two women in the original settling party, founded the first Hospital in Montreal and devoted the rest of her life to it. Later came Marguerite Bourgeoys who founded the first school. The "Jesuit Relations" are an important historical account of these early settlements and of the twelve mission stations scattered throughout the Huron country called, by the Jesuits, Huronia. These missions survived since Indians came, by the hundreds, seeking food and medical attention. Due to the meticulous writings of the Jesuits, their works were published in France. The "Relations" have been collected and translated in an edition of seventy three volumes which provide an invaluable resource of information on many of the original colonies.

## THE NOTARY

There were two notary positions in New France. There were Royal Notaries and Seigneurial Notaries. The Royal Notary had his commission from the King while the Seigneurial Notary received his from the Seigneur. Although there were some governmental duties which could be done by the Royal Notary and not by the Seigneurial Notary, their functions were similar in scope.

Almost every agreement, marriage contract, loan and contract was notarized and recorded. This was the custom in France and was meticulously followed in New France. Many of these documents and records make mention of "cousin". This term was used very loosely and could mean any relative not a brother, sister, son or daughter. Whenever one comes across documents mentioning cousins, one should not take it too literally except to know that there was some kind of family relationship. In the 17th century, a step son or step-daughter was often called a son-in-law or daughter-in-law. By the same token, many sons and daughters-in-law were called sons and daughters. Following this logic, one's mother might actually be a mother-in-law, a brother might be a step-brother and a blood brother might be a brother-in-the-church. All of this should point out that reading and interpreting notarial documents must be done with a great deal of latitude.

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<sup>4</sup>Sieur was a name similar to Sir or Mister and simply denoted a position of respect.



## THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

Prior to marriage, a marriage contract was prepared and executed before a notary. This contract listed everything which both parties brought into the marriage with them. Thus, the contents of the dowry, any possessions and other valuables were listed and became common property of the husband and wife after the marriage. Whatever the bride might inherit or be given after the marriage was hers alone and not subject to ownership by the husband. It was, therefore, important to identify exactly what was being brought into the marriage. Further, the wife's dowry was not subject to any debts incurred during the marriage. No matter the debt incurred by the husband, the wife's dowry was always hers to pass on to her heirs. These marriage contracts were complicated and are difficult to adequately interpret into English from the French language of the time so that they are truly meaningful in today's terms. Whenever these contracts, and other legal writings, are interpreted into English, I have attempted to give the best description of what was being done so that you would be able to appreciate the action rather than have an expert legal translation.

Shiploads of marriageable young ladies were sent out from France. Prospective husbands had to prove that they could support a wife but, even with this restriction, most arrivals were spoken for within two to three weeks. The people of the colony married young and were encouraged to do so by the government. Fathers who had unmarried daughters aged 16 years or sons aged twenty were fined 20 livres by the government. By 1672, when Jean Talon (the colony's first intendant) left the colony, the population had more than doubled to about seven thousand people. This was quite an accomplishment in only ten years.

Many marriages took place in remote settlements between two people and were later blessed by the priest making his rounds. There were times when marriages were performed in winter months, reported to the priest in the spring and, before the priest could register it in the local parish records, he lost his scalp on the trail. Although the real reason escapes this author, there were marriages recorded as "reconstituted" and registered as such exactly one year after the actual marriage date. This may have been as a result of some imposed "waiting period" more than the delay between performance and recording. The term applied to these "remarriages" was "rehabilitated" and not "consummated" so the meaning is open to dispute.

## THE DAUGHTERS OF THE KING (LES FILLES DU ROI)

In 1663, a woman needed a dowry, no matter how small, to marry or even to enter a convent. The size of a girl's dowry usually determined her future position in life and, without it, she faced a dreary life at the bottom of the economic ladder. The initial wave of settlers were men who came to find their fortunes in fur trapping and trading with the Indians. Since there were no white women around, quite a few mixed breed children were born of French fathers. Even the men of crafts and trades, who came later, married Indians. With the religious turmoil and the emphasis placed on Catholicism in France, this upset the Church and therefore the King. French women simply had to be brought to New France.

The prospect of coming to a new land and marrying a man who already had a farm was, in itself, an overwhelming incentive for women of marriageable age. These women included widows, orphans and adventurous women, some of whose reputation was not the purest ("women of the streets"). Love was something that was expected to come later. The stumbling block, however, was the dowry. A plan was devised where these women were each given 50 livres (see definition section) by King Louis XIV to induce them to make the voyage. Thus these women were called "The Daughters Of



The King" (Les Filles du Roi) and came to New France between 1663 and 1673. During that time, about 800 women endured the long Atlantic crossing and faced the cold, harsh Canadian winters, as well as the Indian tomahawk, to start a new life in the new world.

The Filles du Roi were women who were in some way sponsored by King Louis XIV to come to Canada to settle (ie. to marry a male colonist). Although some had their travel and initial lodging paid by the King, a few were from noble or bourgeois families and others from more modest backgrounds. Many were partial or full orphans because their father/parents was/were deceased. The majority of these women were young, some were more mature and a few were widows.

## THE DIT NAME

One more thing must be known about these times and the names our ancestors were known by. They often had a second name by which they were known. This was called a "dit" name. "Dit" in French can be translated directly as "say" but in this use it indicates "also called" or "also known as" and was used more appropriately as "the said" being meant to indicate that the person was also known by a second name. These names came from an infinite number of sources and for an equally infinite number of reasons. They were based on a multitude of origins including but not limited to one's occupation, place of origin, physical or character description, maternal identification, heroic deed or accomplishment, easier pronunciation, misspellings, seigneurial identification or military experiences. The two names could be interchanged at any time.

Charles Guyon dit LaMontagne may appear as LaMontagne dit Guyon. Charles could have been baptized under the name Guyon, married as LaMontagne dit Guyon, found in a census as LaMontagne and buried as Guyon dit LaMontagne. He may have been the runt of the military troop and might have gotten the nick name "LaMontagne" (meaning mountain) as a ribbing by the other men calling him "Mountain Man". Another example of a dit name is the Bergeron family. This family had its origins from their ancestor Amboise Bergeron. Those members who descended from Ambroise were said to be from Amboise or de Amboise. The language of the day was oral and not really written so these descendants were called d'Amboise from which the family name of Damboise was born. Our Bélanger family has some "dit" names associated with it. Some are obvious variations while others are not so clear. We have such names as Bellanger, Berrenger or Beranger (German variations), Baker (Anglicized version of Boulanger), Boulanger, etc. Some others are not so obvious as our ancestor Nicolas Bellanger dit Catherine. Nicolas may have had a mother or grandmother by the name of Catherine.

As many should remember, Emile Bélanger (our uncle) moved to Van Buren and opened "Baker's Machine Shop" which was a derivation of Boulanger. He, therefore, had a Bélanger dit Baker name. The townspeople had called him "Bake" for many years and, although his name was not originally Boulanger, he accepted that dit name. He had little choice in the matter. He capitalized on it, however, and named his machine shop under that dit name. There is some truth to the story that, it often helped an American businessman to be known by an American name and not associated with his Canadian roots. This can be seen in the 1990s in many areas. There are those who come from Canada, have a difficult time with the English language but insist on speaking English rather than French. I have experienced much of this behavior in the Nashua, NH area. I suppose some of them don't think they have a French accent and are fooling the rest of us.

There are other interesting stories of how dit names came about. One of these concerns the dit name Dumont, and shows how these dit names changed the surname of entire families for ongoing generations. There was a family in Normandy named Gueret which was spelled Gure, Guere and



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Guerey. It seems Jean Guerey married Francoise de Meherenc in August of 1634. Now, Francoise was the daughter of Jean de Meherenc and he was the Seigneur du Mont Miral (Mount Miral) in the Village of Canchy, Normandy. Jean Gueret's grandchildren wanted to be associated with their mother's ancestry, the Seigneur Du Mont (of the Mount), so they referred to themselves as being of the family Du Mont. They were therefore Gueret DuMont until the Gueret surname was dropped altogether. That is how Dumont became a dit name for Gueret. Even the Dumont name was often changed to Dumond for reasons unknown to this author.

The dit name continues today in efforts to anglicize French family names. How many people do you know named Bishop who were Levesques, Baker who were Boulanger, White who were Le-Blanc, Roy or King who were Roi, Stone who were St Pierre, Mills who were Grenier, Green who were Verreau, and the list goes on. The "eau" and "X" names are another example. The story has it that French, illiterate, voyagers named Thibo were from areas near the sea, therefore near the water "eau". Their name soon became Thibo d'eau or Thibodeau. When they migrated to other areas on ships they were checked off upon disembarkment. When their name was called out and they responded that they were present the letter X was placed behind their name. Now they were known as Thibodeaux.

## **FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS**

The early years of the development of New France brought us to the times of the French and Indian wars which continued from 1680 to 1748 with only short periods of peace. The French and their Indian allies raided many outlying New England villages, burned homes, killed the inhabitants and carried off hundreds of captives to Canada. Many of these captives became the property of the Indians who had been in the habit of taking captives from other tribes in their own wars. Although some of these captives were terrorized, tortured and killed; many, especially children, were well treated and taken in to be raised as their own. Others were ransomed by the French and adopted by them while still others were ransomed by the English and returned to New England. You should be happy to know that there is no evidence that any of the Bélanger ancestors were in any way involved in any of this activity.

Our direct ancestors escaped Indian massacres and the Acadian expulsion. The reason for this was obvious, they lived mostly in the developed regions of the new world in and around Quebec City, Beauport, L'Ange Gardien, Chateau Richer and the Isle of Orleans. Being more merchants and businessmen (Seigneurs) than farmers, they needed to be around populated areas.

In 1689 war broke out between France and England (again) and lasted until 1697. This conflict spilled over into the settlements of North America well into the 18th century. Port Royal fell to Sir William Phips who sailed from Boston in 1690. When Phips went on to try and take Quebec, he met up with Count Frontenac. As Governor, Frontenac defied Phips to do his worst, which he did. It soon became evident to Phips that he was wasting his time and ammunition and he retreated to Boston. Those cliffs and high vantage points overlooking the seaway really did have great defense value. Port Royal was handed back to the French with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 only to be captured again in 1710. This was the final act which caused Acadia to come under English rule and Port Royal's name was changed to Annapolis Royal.

In 1713 the Treaty of Utrecht marked the end of the wars in North America. France conceded Acadia to England and gave up claims to Hudson Bay and Newfoundland but retained Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton. This pause from war with the English allowed the French to freely explore west and down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. They established posts and missions all



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along the river and had a large settlement in New Orleans with farms and homes just like those in New France. Look at all the towns and cities along the Mississippi named after saints, today.

By 1763, the British, in New England, had conquered the French in New France and expelled all French forces from North America. Britain's acquisition of New France was confirmed in the "Peace of Paris" of 1763. Approximately 60,000 French Canadians (and 1,500 Acadians who had drifted back) now faced a North America that was British from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson Bay. For the French, this meant adjustment to an utterly alien way of life, despite the fact that subsequent British rule was, on the whole, acceptable. English criminal law was adopted, but it soon proved essential that French civil law be retained. Both were recognized by the Quebec Act of 1774. After the American Revolution, immigration to Canada rapidly increased as the Loyalists (businessmen and farmers alike) fled the new United States.

The formidable problems of adjustment between two quite different peoples and their legal, religious, and social systems were partly solved in 1791 by dividing the old province of Quebec into two parts, Lower Canada (modern Quebec) and Upper Canada (modern Ontario), each with its own legislature. The province of Nova Scotia was also divided: Prince Edward Island had been established as a separate colony in 1769; New Brunswick was created in 1784. Newfoundland was still a fishing station and was not given representative government until 1832.

Because the French settlements were so remote and the people were peaceful, the English found that they were just as well to leave them alone. Perhaps the British had learned a lesson from their dealings with the American colonies. In any event, the French way of life, under English rule, did not change much from what it had been before. In fact, new avenues of trade and markets for goods opened up which had been closed under French rule. England allowed the French to govern themselves and interfered very little in their way of life. Instead of being oppressed, New France found life under English rule to be just as good, if not better than it was, under French rule. The citizens of New France had no desire, even when the opportunity later presented itself, to again fall under French rule. When the American Revolution expelled the British from its borders, New France had already received a large amount of New Englanders as settlers. The ties between America and Canada remained strong even though Canada was governed by the very British that had been repelled from American shores. Many new Canadian families had family left behind in America.

### **LE RAMANCHEUR THE BONE SETTER<sup>5</sup>**

"Le Ramancheur" or the "Rebouteur" was primarily a bone setter by definition, though this old-time medical practitioner treated many other ills. Our ancestors visited this healer for twisted backs and pulled muscles (*tour de rein*), sprained ankles and for getting back on "*le piton*" (the button). Le Ramancheur performed miracles with his finger tips, being a sort of "good devil" who learned the art of massage and bone setting from his parents. Some believed that this was a gift which was inherited from a grandparent at the moment of death. This bone setter must have been the forerunner of our modern day Chiropractor. He became well known and was highly anticipated when he finally came around to the village.

The bone setter was also an extraordinary story teller. His arrival in a parish was preceded by great excitement and anticipation by the residents as the Rebouteur traveled through his territory. If the healer was not in the vicinity, people in need of help would travel great distances to find him. The Ramancheur used his hands exclusively. One touch yielded a diagnosis and a second touch

<sup>5</sup>Reprinted from the American-Canadian Genealogist Vol 19, Nr 4, Issue 58, Fall 1993, P.175.



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yielded a cure. For fractures, following the setting of bones, wooden splints were immobilized with strips of fabric. Homemade crutches were custom built, by the bone setter, and fitted to each patient. Liniments and "cataplasmes" (poultices) were also used.

The Ramancheur never charged a specific amount of money, nor was he frequently paid in currency. People paid what they could afford for the services received, tending to pay in direct relation to the amount of pain which had been relieved. In the smaller villages, payment was in the form of farm produce and animals. In the larger towns, legal tender was used.

Not all the people were pleased to have a Ramancheur in their midst. Physicians tried to discredit them. The Ramancheur was very cunning and astute. Confronted by disbelievers, the bone setter would reply by disjointing a hen or a cat, then putting them back together immediately. Faith and respect for the Rebouteur was quickly restored but, such an extravagant show did not convince everyone. The Ramancheur had a bitter pill to swallow when he was brought to court and tried for the illegal practice of medicine by some whose pain remained. Fines were imposed as well as imprisonment. This discouraged many from practicing and eventually led to their complete disappearance from Quebec. I guess the liability was just too great.

### **WHY WE ARE CALLED "FROGS"<sup>6</sup>**

In the late 1500s and early 1600s, many made the voyage from France to New France to settle. The voyage was made in small ships with three to five sailing masts and the voyage took about three months. The voyagers were at the mercy of the winds and currents and spent many days in cramped quarters. Along with the crew of 20 to 30 men, the passengers shared a rather large second deck for sleeping, eating and socializing. Many got sick from varied diseases like scurvy and dysentery and a good number died along the route. Since disease free travelers boarded the ships, there seemed to be no origin for disease to afflict the passengers. This brought about a constant effort to discover the origin of any diseases and it was often thought that the drinking water might be the source as it often became rancid from being stored in barrels. A scheme was devised which provided for the placement of a live frog in a water barrel which was next in line to be used. As long as the frog, in that barrel, remained alive, the water was thought to be of acceptable drinking quality. If the frog died, the water was used for other purposes. When the British sailors heard of this odd custom they started calling the French sailors "Frog Sailors" and this, soon enough, caused French immigrants to be called "Frogs".

Although there are those that consider being called a "Frog" an ethnic slur, most Frenchmen don't mind it at all. Most people of every ethnic origin have had a common title attached to their origins and the French were not about to escape that. Being called a Frog is similar to being called a "Mackerel Smacker" (Catholic for their custom of not eating meat on Friday) or a Newfie (Native Newfoundlander) and others. There are many jokes where the Frog is in the hot seat but, since most are never meant with malicious intent, the term has become more common than not.

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<sup>6</sup>Information taken from an article written by Frank R. Binette of Laconia, NH.



## UNITS OF MEASURE AND MONETARY EQUIVALENTS

Arpent	Square arpents were 7/8 of an acre or 36,864 square feet while a lineal arpent was 192 feet long
League	A league was 84 Arpents but was also used to indicate a distance of 3 miles
Toise	A lineal toise was 6.4 feet while a square toise was 40 square feet
Minot	This was a measure of 1.05 bushels
Sol	This was the coin of the day and it took 20 sols to equal 1 livre
1 Livre	The value of an unskilled worker's 10 hour day. This gave him 300 Livres/yr ; equal to \$15,000 in 1990
3 Livres	The value of a skilled worker's 10 hour day. This gave him 900 Livres/yr; equal to \$40,000 in 1990 dollars
Livre (In 1650)	A low ranking official, would earn 2 livres/day, 600/yr; equal to \$30,000 in 1990 money A high ranking official would earn 8 livres/day, 2400/yr; equal to \$80,000 in 1990 dollars The Governor would have received 12,000 livres per year or about \$200,000 dollars in 1990 pay
INFLATION by 1750	By 1750, 100 years later, these values of labor had only doubled, due to inflation

A livre minted in Paris was worth 25 sous. A livre minted at Tours was called a "Livre Tournais" and was only worth 20 sous. A "sous" was a silver coin worth 12 deniers and a denier was like a penny.



## AND WHAT DID THESE MONETARY EQUIVALENTS BUY AT THAT TIME?

In 1650	In 1750	What could be purchased for this amount
4 Sols	8 Sols	1 wheat bread, this weighed about 4 lbs.
12 Sols	20 Sols	1 pound of butter
2 Sols	4 Sols	1 pound of beef (compare the price of butter to beef today!)
2 Sols	4 Sols	1 pound of wheat flower
1 Livre	2 Livres	1 capon
6 Sols	12 Sols	This fed a man for one day. Thus, about 30% of an unskilled worker's earnings went for food
1 Livre	1 Livre	1 gallon of wine
50 Livres	50 Livres	1 barrel of wine. A barrel was 75 gallons
4 Livres	8 Livres	1 minot of wheat (60 pounds)
4 Livres	8 Livres	1 minot of peas
4 Livres	8 Livres	1 minot of corn
2 Livres	4 Livres	1 gallon of hard liquor
40 Livres	60 Livres	1,000 board feet of finished lumber
20 Livres	40 Livres	1 sow
50 Livres	100 Livres	1 cow
100 Livres	200 Livres	1 ox (7 to 8 years old)
Not Avail	250 Livres	1 horse. These were not yet available in 1650
1 Livre	2 Livres	1 cord of wood
20 Livres	30 Livres	1 church pew. This was paid per year
Worthless	Worthless	1 roture (farm) of raw land
500 Livres	500 Livres	1 roture with 20 arpents cleared
1,000 Livres	2,000 Livres	1 roture with 20 arpents cleared including a cabin and barn
4,000 Livres	6,000 Livres	1 roture with 40 arpents cleared including a house, barn and stable