

CHAPTER TWO

Our Roots In New France¹

THE BELL FAMILY FROM ANGERS IN FRANCE

There is an old story handed down generation to generation about the Bélanger name. My mother, Irene, shared this story with the family, which we accepted without question. The story says that the original family name was Bell. It goes on to describe the proverbial "three brothers" who moved from Angers, near Paris, to another place in France. The geographic location is not revealed in the story but with the information on Francois² and Nicolas³ one has to wonder if it was near Normandy (Calvados), where they originated. The story relates that residents of the new location referred to the Bells from Angers (in French this would be "Les Bell d'Angers") and this became a "dit" name for Bellanger which later became Bélanger.



¹ Much research information obtained from the Souvenir Album, Rassemblement des Bélanger - 1980, published by la Societe de Conservation du Patrimoine Culturel des Bélanger Ltee.

² Francois Bellanger (7 Oct 1612-1687) m Marie Guyon (18 Mar 1624-29 Aug 1695) 12 Jul 1637 at Quebec.

³ Nicolas Bellanger (1638-19 Oct 1682) m Marie de Rainville (1645-6 Nov 1711) 11 Jan 1660 at Quebec.

FACT OR FICTION

The story of the three Belanger brothers is that two of these brothers migrated to New France while a third settled in New England. The common pronunciation for the Bélanger name, at the start of the 17th century, was Bell-anger, with emphasis on the Bell, which lends credence to this original story. There is no written support for this theory which was told by Irene Michaud Bélanger, wife of Gerald Bélanger, son of Lucien, grandson of Damase. Irene assembled a large amount of information on the Bélanger family and was constantly searching to prove or disprove this story of the Bell name. In Irene's attempt to discover a link with the third brother (she, at one time, felt that Francois and Nicolas were brothers) she wrote several letters to Bélanger families in the Massachusetts area. At about the time of her death, Irene was convinced that Francois and Nicolas were father and son. She had a family tree of names all the way back to Francois⁴, which showed this, even before we attended the Rassemblement des Bélanger⁵ in 1980 and were told there was no proof of any relationship between the two. Irene felt Nicholas was the illegitimate son of Francois and possibly Marie Guyon in which case, because of the religious pressures of the day, he would never have been recognized since he was "un enfant naturel". The history of the Bélanger farms in Chateau Richer detail extensive land transactions between Francois and his sons/daughters. No mention is ever made of Nicolas in any of these transactions. Nicolas does not show up at any of the weddings or other events in the Francois Bélanger family and this certainly leads one to believe there was no relationship at all.

The more information which is found on both Francois and Nicolas, the more one would expect some mention of the other if they were related in any way. Beauport and Chateau Richer were adjoining and one would think that one of them would have come into the written record of the other if there was any blood relation between them especially if Nicolas was Francois' son.

LDS FAMILY HISTORY CENTER

Research done at a LDS Family History Center reveals some individuals with a family name of Bel in Angers, France but they were there 100 years too late. There are no records of Bélanger, Belanger, Bell or Bel prior to the early 1700s in the records for Angers, France at the LDS history center.

LEONIDAS BELANGER'S RESEARCH

Francois was the first with the Bélanger name to establish himself in the new country which was still vastly unexplored. His exact origin is not known. He is said to have originated from Saint Thomas of Touques, in Calvados, because he had been believed to be the brother of Nicolas, but the research of Father Archange Godbout, as well as that of Leonidas Bélanger, shows only one clue; at his confirmation at Quebec on February 2, 1660, Francois Bélanger represents himself as being from the diocese of Lisieux in Normandy. Extensive research has not been able to shed any other light on his origin.

The second Bélanger of note was Nicolas and much has been written about the relationship, or lack of, between the two. Mr. Leonidas Bélanger, a present day genealogist⁶ who is a descendant of Francois, cites historians Thwaites and Sulte, as well as Genealogist Tanguay, to prove that Francois

⁴ Son of Francois and Francoise Horlays of Touque, Normandy, France.

⁵ Bélanger family gathering at which 4,000 attended in Quebec in 1980.

⁶ See special recognition to Léonidas at end of this chapter.

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was originally from Touques in Normandy. There is conflicting information about the relationship between Francois and Nicolas as you will see later in the story of Nicolas. The research conducted by Father Archange Godbout and Leonidas Bélanger fail to prove any relationship between Francois and Nicolas. Father Godbout did, however, find names of other Bellangers in the registers of Saint Thomas de Touques in the period 1628 - 1657. Some of these were; Jacques, Jean, Hector, Louis, Robert, Marguerite, Francoise, Marie and Catherine. He could not connect Nicolas with any of the names he found. We know, however, from the research of others that Nicolas Bellanger had a dit name of Catherine and there might be a connection with the Catherine found by Father Godbout in Touques.

The only record that Nicolas was ever in France or from France was at his marriage when it was recorded that he was from Saint Thomas de Touques. These records are found in the registers of Notre Dame de Quebec as that is where the marriages of Beauport were kept since Beauport had not yet been established as a parish. This certainly appears to contradict the supposition that Nicolas was the son of Marie Guyon. However, even these records are subject to scrutiny as shown in the following paragraphs.

During the 17th century, Francois and Nicolas Bellanger left France (at different times) for New France (Canada). In the next century, Antoine and Pierre followed suit. One after the other, they enlarged the circle of this Bélanger family which is today one of the most popular of the country. The lineage formed by Francois and Nicolas Bélanger are the two most important roots of the family.

BENOIT PONTBRIAND RESEARCH

A compilation of marriages of Notre Dame De Quebec by Benoit Pontbriand lists two marriages of note. One is a marriage between Marie Madeleine Bélanger and Bertran Chesne on 7 August 1656. Marie's parents are listed as Francois and Marie Guyon. All research done by Godbout and Leonidas Bélanger shows that Francois and Marie had a daughter named Marie Madeleine. None of the authoritarians disagree with that. A second marriage on 11 January 1660 is listed between Nicolas and Marie de Rainville. The parents of Nicolas are listed as Francois and Marie Guyon. The origin of this information is not known and one would assume it was given by Nicolas. Research in the PRDH volumes of records shows those present at the wedding ceremony of Nicolas but fail to list the parents of Nicolas as being present. These records don't even show Francois or his wife Marie as being present either. There is a theory, unfounded as it may be, that Nicolas was the son of Francois, conceived prior to his marriage with Marie Guyon and therefore never recognized by his parents. This would not explain the note, at his marriage, that Nicolas was from France. It is a well known fact that married couples, in those days, had a child every year. There is even a rule of thumb observed by modern day amateur genealogists that, "If you go two years between births, you have a child missing". It is especially odd to have a long gap between the marriage and the birth of the first child. In this case, Francois and Marie are said to have married in 1637 and their first born son, Charles, arrived in 1640. This certainly makes one wonder about Nicolas who was reportedly born in 1638.

TANGUAY RESEARCH

The works of L'Abbe C. Tanguay, A.D.S. in his Dictionnaire Genealogique des Familles Canadiennes, 1608 to 1700, reveals more information. On page 38, Tanguay lists Francois, married to Marie Guyon, with a first child named Nicolas. This information lists Nicolas with a birth year of 1638 and shows him married to Marie de Rainville on 11 January 1660. Tanguay then goes on to list

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Charles as Francois' second child. Other stories of Francois, which did not mention Nicolas, showed Charles as his first born.

On that same page 38, just under the listing for Francois, we find the listing for Nicolas. This shows Nicolas as being of the second generation and shows Francois as the name of his father. No birth date is listed here.

JETTE RESEARCH

From here, we go to the works of Jette, in his Dictionnaire Genealogique des Familles du Quebec. On page 76 we find the listing for Francois. Here Jette alludes that Francois and Nicolas are related but he does not disclose how. He lists the origin of Francois as *perhaps* being from St. Thomas de Touques and shows that to be near Pont L'Eveque in the Diocese of Lisieux, Normandy (Calvados). He then goes on to list Nicolas, on the same page, as being from the exact same location. In like manner as with Francois, Jette says that Nicolas is *perhaps* related to Francois. He also lists a dit name for Nicolas (Bélanger dit Catherine) which he did not list for Francois. The origin and/or significance of this dit name has not been discovered.

COMITE DES ANCIENNES FAMILLES

In the book Le Livre D'Or de la Noblesse Rurale Canadienne-Francaise published by the Comité des Anciennes Familles in Quebec 1909; we find on page 64 and 65 a history of some Bélanger families. Two of these are of prime interest. The first is the family history of Napoleon Bélanger who married Edwige Gagnon in 1902 and lives in Beauport, Quebec. His ancestry is traced back through Elie, Pierre, Pierre, Joseph-Marie, Nicolas, Nicolas and Francois. This history indicates Nicolas as being the son of Francois. The second is that of Theophile whose ancestry is Augustin, Louis, Claude, Claude, Louis, Francois, Charles and Francois. This history, done by the same committee that did the one on Elie indicates Charles as being the son of Francois. This would corroborate that Charles and Nicolas were brothers.

SUMMARY

The information about Nicolas, and his history before coming to Canada, would tend to indicate that he and Francois may have been brothers or related in some way, other than as father and son. If one believes Nicolas came from France, and was not born in Canada, it is less plausible that Nicolas is the son of Marie Guyon. There is so much information recorded that indicates the father and son relationship, however, that one cannot ignore that possibility. If they were father and son, Nicolas could have been born in France, out of wedlock, to a different mother; perhaps one named Catherine?⁷ Although there was a wide difference in age between the two (for brothers), which was not uncommon in those days, it is possible that one brother followed the footsteps of the other into this new country, but then the same could be said about the son following the father. It would also fit in with the story of the three Bell brothers. There is too much conflicting information given on this subject and one cannot decipher which information is based on fact and which is based on conjecture.

No matter the uncertainty of the relationship, all agree that the second notable Bélanger on record is Nicolas who is said to have originated from Saint Thomas of Touques in Calvados. From his reported age for the census of 1666, 1667 and 1681 he must have been born between 1632 and 1637 and, in his childhood, became accomplished in the salt trade. Salt was hard to come by in New

⁷ This would explain his Dit name of Catherine, or could that have been his grandmother?

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France and salt merchants were not only in demand but highly thought of. Salt was necessary to preserve fish and meat over the winter months and, as such, was a commodity few could do without. What we are certain about is that he is found in New France around 1658 employed by the merchant Francois Perron. We also find that he has posted bail for his friend Roger Dore.

It is curious to note that, even though Francois and Nicolas were never proven to be related, they brought many similar characteristics to New France. Ten of Nicolas and Marie's children established themselves here. Like their parents, the children were good Catholics and had many children.

LÉONIDAS BÉLANGER (1913-1986)⁸

Commission de toponymie:

Certificat de désignation toponymique commémorative

Rappelant sa politique destinée à favoriser et promouvoir la commémoration des personnages qui ont marqué l'histoire et le développement du Québec;

Accueillant favorablement la requête de la Société historique du Saguenay; La Commission de toponymie, lors de sa réunion du 3 juin 1994, a officialisé le toponyme Mont Léonidas Bélanger pour identifier une entité orographique située dans le parc régional des Monts-Valin,

Ainsi, la Commission est heureuse de rendre hommage à Léonidas Bélanger et par la même occasion de souligner le 60^{ème} anniversaire de la fondation de la Société historique du Saguenay.

Originaire de Chicoutimi, Léonidas Bélanger (1913-1986) fait ses études au Séminaire de Chicoutimi et chez les Pères Trappistes de Mistassini. Président de la Société historique du Saguenay de 1967 à 1981, il voit aussi à la réorganisation du Musée du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean dont il devient le premier directeur. En 1967, il reçoit la Médaille du Centenaire de la Confédération; en 1978, il est décoré de l'Ordre du Canada et, en 1980, il se mérite le prix du Loisir scientifique. En 1974, il devient le sixième membre de l'Ordre des Vingt et Un pour ses recherches historiques et généalogiques, son activité dans la Société historique du Saguenay et comme promoteur du Musée du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean.

Certificat remis à la Société historique du Saguenay, le 1er octobre 1994, lors du congrès de l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française.

The above recognizes Leonidas Bélanger for his contributions in genealogical work and names a mountain (Mont Leonidas Bélanger) after him.

⁸ "Saguenayensia, volume 36, no 4, octobre-décembre 1994, p. 41.