

# My Acadian Ancestors

by: Paul Vilmur

## Introduction

Félicité LANDRY my 2<sup>nd</sup> Great-Grandmother and god-mother to my grandfather Evariste VILLEMURE has a family history which dates back to the early settlement of French Acadia and the Acadian exile. This account relates some of the early history of Acadia and the events and aftermath of the exile as it impacted my LANDRY and HEBERT families.

## Early Acadian History

Acadia as it finally ended up consisted of Ile-Royal (Cape Breton Island), Nova Scotia, Ile St. Jean (Prince Edward Island) and the Eastern coast of what is now New Brunswick. The first French settlement was in 1604 on the West side of Nova Scotia along the Bay of Fundy and called Port-Royal (now Annapolis Royal). Because of numerous British raids, a permanent settled area really didn't get established here until about 1640. Population increased slowly by fits and starts until by 1670 there were about 300 settlers at Port-Royal made up of about 70 farming families along the Dauphin River. By 1707 the French-Acadian population had increased to about 1400; spread between Port-Royal and an area further up the Bay of Fundy called "Les Mines" which consisted of the settlements of Riviere-aux-Canards, Grand-Pre and Pigiguit. There were also

a few settlers on the New Brunswick coast in an area called Beaubassin.

From 1683 to 1713 these colonists were caught up in what seemed like continual warfare between France and Great Britain. Port-Royal survived two British attacks in 1709 but finally surrendered to the British in 1710. When hostilities ended, all Acadians came under British control by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 where the Acadian Peninsula (Nova Scotia), Hudson Bay and Newfoundland were handed over to the British. The new local British government forced the French speaking population to swear allegiance to the British king, which they very reluctantly accepted under the condition that they could remain neutral in the English-French struggles. Although the British authorities were unhappy about this they accepted the right of the Acadians not to fight against their French brothers.

In 1755, the seven years war between France and Britain started. The British disregarded claims of Acadian neutrality so in 1755, the commander-in-chief of Nova Scotia, Colonel Charles LAWRENCE decided that the French speaking Acadians were an impediment to Britain conquering the rest of French North America and used a brief by the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, Jonathan

BELCHER, as an excuse to round them all up for deportation. About 1500 escaped to Québec while others hid out in New Brunswick; the rest (10,000 from a total of about 12,000) were deported between October 1755 and August 1758. All the Eastern seaboard states took in refugees including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia. Many sent to the Southern states eventually came to Louisiana. Some 3,500 Acadians from Prince Edward Island were sent back to France.

### **The LANDRY Family**

My first ancestor to arrive at Port-Royal probably around 1640 was René LANDRY- LE AINE. He was called “Landry the Elder” to differentiate him from a younger René LANDRY living in the area who it is believed was not a relation. René the Elder was born about 1618 in Lachausse, Loudun in the department of Vienne. There is much speculation about the parents of René the Elder with many researchers confusing his ancestry with the parents of René LANDRY the Younger. It appears that René married a quite young (possibly 13 or 14 years old) Perrine BOURG in France around 1639 and immigrated to Acadia a short time later. René and Perrine settled at Port-Royal and there had at least nine children between 1640 and 1663.

Felicite’s ancestral line continues with René’s son Pierre. Pierre was born about 1658 at Port-Royal. He married Madeleine ROBICHAUD about 1682 at Port-Royal. They had at least 7 children between 1683 and 1706 all born in the Port-Royal area. Pierre’s son Jean-Baptiste born about 1690 in Port Royal continues the ancestral line. Jean married Madeleine MELANSON in 1697 in

Grand-Pré. They had about 12 children, 10 of whom were living at the time of the deportation. Son Charles born in 4 November 1738 at Grand-Pré was Felicite’s grandfather.

The ancestors of Madeleine MELANSON is also an interesting story. Her great grandfather was Pierre LAVERDURE. Pierre LAVERDURE was born in La Rochelle, France around 1608 and was raised as a French Huguenot. The seaport of La Rochelle was the center of French Calvinism. The Catholic King Louis XIII had ordered a severe and savage siege of La Rochelle in 1628. As a result Pierre LAVERDURE escaped to England where he married Priscilla MELANSON in Plymouth, England about 1630. The family and three sons (Pierre, Charles-Phillipe and John) immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1657 where Pierre converted to Roman-Catholic and adopted his wife’s surname MELANSON as a “dit” name. Pierre moved again with wife and son John to Boston after England took over Nova Scotia. Sons Pierre Jr. & Charles stayed behind in Nova Scotia. The son of Pierre Jr, Philippe-Charles, dropped the LAVERDURE surname altogether and was known as Philippe MELANSON. He is the father of Madeleine MELANSON.

### **The Deportation**

In October of 1755, the Jean-Baptiste LANDRY family was caught in the Acadian round-up and deported to Boston Massachusetts arriving in November 1755. The Acadian exiles in Protestant Massachusetts were not treated well. They were scattered among the villages around Boston, billeted in homes or sometimes out buildings and treated like indentured servants or worse. In all

1,389 Acadians were deported to Boston. They were essentially prisoners in a foreign land. The fate of the LANDRY family is not known until in January 1757 a record from Chelmsford Massachusetts shows this family assigned to the town for care. Chelmsford is about 40 miles North of Boston. They were not in good shape. Jean's wife had a broken arm, son Charles was so sick he couldn't work and son Joseph had three young boys all very sick. One of these children died in 1759. Another of Jean's sons, Simon-Pierre, would die in 1760.

Jean-Baptiste LANDRY'S son Charles married Marie HEBERT probably in Chelmsford around 1765. (The marriage was reconfirmed at L'Assomption, Québec late in 1766.) They might have had a child born in Massachusetts before returning to Canada. Marie was from another exiled Acadian family from Pigiguit, Nova Scotia. The HEBERT family was probably deported on the same ship as the LANDRY family. Marie's great grandfather, Etienne HEBERT, came to Port-Royal about 1640.

### The Return

In 1763, the treaty of Paris was signed giving all of former French North America to the British except for the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon which are just South of Newfoundland. In 1766, Massachusetts governor LAWRENCE decided to allow the Acadians held there to return to French speaking Canada. The Governors of the various Québec Seigneuries now under British control were instructed to welcome back the Acadians. This was a not an easy trip. The Boston area families probably made their way on foot across Massachusetts

into New York state to Albany and then by boat up Lake Champlain to the Richelieu River to the St. Lawrence River. Apparently the LANDRY families first arrived at L'Assomption in September of 1766. This village was about 30 miles Southwest from where the Richelieu River joins the St. Lawrence. In the summer of 1767, 43 Acadian families including the LANDRY families moved on to Yamachiche and were welcomed there by the parish priest who went by the long name of Jacques-Maxime CHEF-DE-VILLE DE LA GARENNE. The children of these families born in exile were conditionally baptized at Yamachiche on August 9, 1767.

### Charles LANDRY & Charles Jr.

Charles and Marie's son Charles Jr. was born a few months after arriving in Yamachiche on November 18, 1767. He was a twin of Cécile who died a month later. Seven more children were born in Yamachiche up to 1785. Charles Jr. married Marie-Vincent MAHEU on February 10, 1795 in Riviere-du-Loup (now called Louiseville). This town is about 6 miles Southwest of Yamachiche. Daughter Félicité was born of this marriage on February 2, 1798 at Louiseville. She married Antoine VILLEMURE January 7, 1817 at St. Leon-le-Grand in Maskinonge County. Félicité was god-mother at the baptism of her grandson Evariste VILLEMURE on December 2, 1862. Félicité died at St. Leon on June 8, 1871.

### Bibliography

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