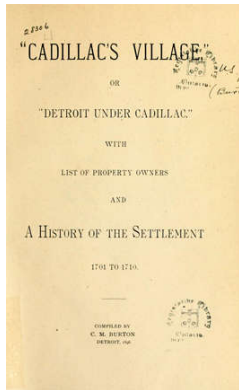


Cadillac's Village, Or, Detroit Under Cadillac: With List of Property Owners and a History of the Settlement, 1701 to 1710



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1. The early colonists of Lower Canada obtained from the French government grants of extensive tracks of land. These grants were executed in the medieval phraseology used under the feudal system of holding estate. The settlers assuming a resemblance between their holdings and the domains of the French barons and "seigneurs", called their large, wild farms by certain titles, and affixed the same to their own family names, in imitation of the European nobility. In some cases, these titles were confirmed by the government. The owners of these vast estates considered themselves "seigneurs" of their new country and were very proud of the affixes to their names. In business transactions these additions to their signatures were used with all their flourishes. At baptisms the title had to be entered in the parish registers; at marriages the affix to the old family name sounded high both for the bride and groom in the verbose marriage contract; respectability was increased by the presence of many witnesses with titled names. In this manner the owners of large estates in Lower Canada, at a certain period of the seventeenth century, looked upon themselves and upon each other as quasi-nobility. Their children naturally assumed those titles and often thought more of the affixes than of their own family names. Feudalism was about dead, and fast dying in Europe in those days, and therefore could not gain foothold in America. In the eighteenth century we do not find new titles originating; still the old ones remained.

The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these titled pioneers often discarded the old family name and were known only by the new title. Hence, the new names that the genealogist has to contend with. As an illustration, take the Trotier family. The Trotiers of America all descend from Julius Trotier, born in 1590, in the parish of St. Martin, in the town of Ige, in the province of Perche, France. He, seemingly a common citizen, came with his family to Canada about the year 1645. His children married in Canada, and in the course of time, had large families. They obtained extensive estates and were very lavish in originating titles for the same. In a few years we find Trotier Sieur des Ruisseaux, Trotier Seigneur de L'Isle Perrot, Trotier Sieur de Beaubien. Many of these Trotiers gradually dropped the family name and signed only the assumed title. Hence, we have the families of Beaubien, Desruisseaux, etc. All these trace to a common ancestor Julius Trotier.

2. Another cause of the change of French names was the custom so prevalent in former times, of nicknaming themselves and others. This was done sometimes to discern one family from another of the same name; as a family Baron was nicknamed Lupien - Baron dit Lupien - to distinguish it from other Baron families, Lupien being the Christian name of the ancestor of that family in this country. At other occasions the nickname originated through family pride; when a member was distinguished, that branch of the family would annex the Christian name of the hero, or, if a woman, the family name of the revered heroine. In this manner some Cuilleriers lost their own name through the marriage of John Cuillerier with Mary Catherine Trotier de Beaubien; this lady was distinguished through her family title of Beaubien, and after John Cuillerier's death, by becoming the wife of Francis Picote de Belestre, an officer of Fort Ponchartrain. On this account her children from the first marriage signed themselves Cuillerier dit Beaubien, and in later generations Cuillerier was dropped and nothing was left but Beaubien.

There are nicknames that originated from the peculiar circumstances of birth, like Nicolas Campau dit Niagara, who was born at the Portage of Niagara, when his parents were traveling from Detroit to Montreal. It happened, also, that nicknames were given by Indians, as Labadie dit Badichon, Peltier dit Antaya. Nicknames have also been given frivolously and would stick in future generations, as in the family of Poissant, sounding like Poisson (fish), by adding Lasaline (salt), Poissant dit Lasaline (saltfish). Another way of nicknaming was by adopting a peculiar Christian name by which a certain person was known in the community; so we find the family of Le Tourneux, a Jean-Baptiste Le Tourneux, who settled in Sandwich, opposite the Michigan Central Depot of present Detroit, about 110 years ago. He was known by everyone as Jeannette (the diminutive name of Jean); by incorrect spelling he became Janet and Janette, hence, Le Tourneux dit Janette. His numerous descendants are called Jannette. Other modes might be mentioned. It is singular that scarcely a name has been adopted from the trade, occupation or profession that a person followed. These nicknames are attached to the name proper by the word "dit" which might be rendered in our language by "called", "named", "namely", "to wit", "known as", but "dit" is so idiomatically French that it can hardly be translated into English. The suppression of "s" in some names, as from Chesne to Chene, Estienne to Etienne, is accounted for by the evolution of the French language from the old form to the modern way of spelling.

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