

Introductory History

By R. P. Lege

Richelieu Leger family Association Historian

This column will begin with excerpts from the history of Jean Leger dit Richelieu, Guardian of the King's Warehouse of Quebec and is written by R. P. Legé.

Around 1608, Quebec was established as an outpost for the fur trade on the St. Lawrence River in a territory which was called New France (Canada). Several motives influenced the early French colonists to migrate to the new territory in the west. First, there was the passion of the King for territorial expansion; second, the desire of commercial interests for pelts and the possibility of finding precious metals; third, the wish to convert the Indians to the Catholic faith; and lastly, the yearning of adventure by most of the people of the seventeenth century. Over the next six decades many Frenchmen, including fishermen, fur trappers, and even the clergy, would migrate to Tadoussac, Quebec, Trois-Rivieres (Tree Rivers), and Montreal. The Jesuits, an order of clerks of the Catholic Church of France, were sent to New France to convert the Indians and heretic hunters. In 1632, the territory of New France was restored to France by the treaty of St. Germain. At this time, the Jesuits were placed in charge of the spiritual interests of the settlers and Indians in New France, and thus, the history of their greatest missions started. Some of the early settlers of new France were Frenchmen with such names as Babineau, Bigot, Bolduc, Bouencha, Brossard, Courcelles, Despres, Daauversiere, DeMezy, Frontenac, Gadouas, Gardeur,

Hebert, Lajeunesse, Lavergne, LeBlanc, Ledet, LeFracois, Leger, Leneuf de las Valliere, Maillard, Maisonneuve, Marceaux, Marchand, Mauager, Neuf de la Poterie, Pelletier, Pinet, Salieres, Talon, Tour, among many others. The first documented Leger to appear in New France was Cesar Leger, when on May 17, 1642, he attended catholic mass with a number of other settlers in celebration of the foundation of Villa-Marie (Montreal). On 28 August 1646, a Jesuit priest departed Quebec in a canoe on the St. Lawrence River to Three Rivers. He was accompanied by two men, Guillaume Pelletier and Pierre Bouencha, and a young boy of fifteen, by the name of Leger, who was a scullion at the fort. Over the next fifty years, as the population grew from French immigrants, the local Indians (Iroquois) became increasingly hostile toward them. In 1665, the French king, Louis XIV, sent his prized army regiment (Carignan-Salieres) to deal with the problem in the territory of New France. After many skirmishes with the Iroquois, the regiment was deactivated in 1668, and many officers and soldiers were offered land grants by the French king to remain in New France, or be returned to France. As many as four hundred soldiers elected to remain. The typical soldier adapted exceptionally well to farm life, and found the life they were accustomed to, among the

colonist. Most of these soldiers were sons of farmers and artisans of the lower class, and had been forced from their towns and villages in France to serve in the army. They accepted this life gratefully and they easily adapted to their routine and chores. When they were not actively engaged in fighting, their stay with colonists, meant for material security, comfort and mutual love. Oftentimes, many of these soldiers married the daughter of a farmer. During the

settlement of New France, there was a shortage of women in the territory. Initially, girls looking for a husband often made their own way to Quebec, paying for the passage by a contract of indenture. However, their numbers were few, so, the King of France directed the recruitment of young women of good quality to fill this need. Initially, the girls suited for the military officers and men of property came from Paris and surrounding suburbs. Many of them had good backgrounds and some even had a little education. However, they did not work well because they were not strong, intelligent girls with excellent health, suited for farm work. Subsequently, most of the girls came from the farm country of Normandy and Ile-de-France. These girls became known as the "Kings Daughters." Between 1663 and 1673, 852 of these girls arrived in New France. Records indicate that by 1771, nearly seven hundred children were born by the girls who had arrived in 1769. Our first ancestor to appear in New France was Jean Leger dit Richelieu. He was the son of Francois Leger and Ann Guingande of Fontevrault, Diocese of Poitiers, France. According to records, he was one of 258 Frenchmen from the province of Anjou, France, who would take stock in New France and contribute to its development. He came from the

district of Saumur, diocese of Poitiers, France. He probably arrived at Quebec around 1724-25, at which time he would have been about thirty years of age. On 11 December 1726, he married Marguerite Marchand in the Notre Dame des Victoires Church of Quebec. They would settle in the suburb of St. Roch on the bank of the St. Charles River, and near the Indendent's Palace, where only four of their eleven children would survive their infancy. All of the surviving children settled at Quebec and Montreal, with the exception of Michel,

who sailed the high seas and decades later died at LaRoche, France.