

OUR TRIP TO FRANCE by John and Evelyn Legè

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We know that all the Lege/Leger/Legere's are waiting to hear of our findings, so we will keep this Journal to a minimum.

John and I have been interested in the genealogy of his family, the Legè/Leger/Legere's, for many years, having traveled to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec, as well as returning to John's birthplace in Abbeville, Louisiana, many, many times, adding to our treasure of information. Evidence was uncovered in the past few years, that the Leger's of Southwest Louisiana were not part of the La Rosette line, but of Jean Leger dit Richelieu ancestry.

In March of this year, my husband, John, and I helped form the Richelieu Leger Family Association in Lafayette, Louisiana, and embarked on a quest for more information on Jean Leger dit Richelieu, by planning a trip to France for this purpose. The day after we arrived in Paris, we met Sara Menestral of Paris, who has been trying to find information at the Archives in Paris for Ranson Lege (of De Funiak Springs, Florida), Historian of the Richelieu Leger Family Association, which could possibly link the Richelieu Leger's to an original family crest. Sara is a researcher (ethnologist) at the CNRS

National Center for Scientific Research and works at the Center of North American Studies in the City of Paris. She was most generous with her time with us. We spent an afternoon together at the Bibliotheque Mazarine in Paris, which dates back 300 years, and were so impressed by its magnificence and voluminous collection of very old books, manuscripts, reference books, and the like. However, after researching for several hours without more Richelieu Leger family information than we had, it appeared unlikely that we could link a crest to our family with the little time we had at the Bibliotheque. We then traveled to St. Fargeau and Cosne, where John's paternal great grandparents (the Fevergeon's) lived until the 1880's. This is truly a beautiful area and we felt privileged to spend a few days there.

We went on to explore areas of the Loire Valley for the next five days, our destination being Fontevraud L'Abbaye, where previous research indicated that Francois Leger and his wife, Anne Guigande had been married.

We arrived at Fontevraud on a beautiful day and inquired of a "storekeeper" where we might go on our genealogy quest. (We found out later that this "storekeeper" was Yves Barte, an architect/artist who does very beautiful work.) He explained to us later that he had been in Quebec and was so impressed with a mural he saw there of the city of Quebec, that he returned home to have a similar drawing done of Fontevraud L'Abbaye as it was in 1699, which is now used in

paintings, postcards, and brochures of Fontevraud. Mr. Barte, a very handsome, and very personable

gentleman, explained that there had been a number of different spellings of little villages close by, whose names were similar to Fontevraud, and the name Fontevraud L'Abbaye was chosen in recent years, to include them all. He introduced himself to us, asked our names, then left his place of business unattended, to personally escort us to the mayor's office, which was across a little street, introduced us to the clerk there and explained our mission to him.

We were enthusiastically received and promptly went to work, going through the Church records of St. Michel's church, which is located next to the Abbaye. These are the original church records from the 1600's . What a sensation it was to go over such old books. The old European-style handwriting of these documents made them difficult to decipher, and it was hard to stifle an outburst, each time we found a document on the Leger's. I, myself, a non-Cajun, unable to read French, was thrilled beyond words each time I found an entry for the Francois Leger family.

We were able to make copies of the following birth, marriage and death records of the "early" Richelieu Leger's. Our Historian, Ranson Leger, has now translated them in its entirety. In the Book "1579 - 1833: List of Families of Fontevraud"; we found 39 Leger's listed. However, we were informed that there are no Leger's living in Fontevraud itself today, although they know of two women who were Leger's, now married, who live nearby. These are our findings: 1664-Anne Guigand, baptized in St. Michel's Church,

Fontevraud L'Abbaye August 24, 1664. Her parents were: Pierre Guigand, a cordonieur (made shoes) and Anne Boyer. 1667-Francois Leger, baptized in St. Lambert des Levees Parish Church in St. Lambert des Levees, (across the Loire River from Saumur) on May 11, 1667, son of Etienne Leger, laboureur, and Nicolle Chudeau. We visited the mayor of St. Lambert de Levee and made a copy of this information. 1691-Francois (a cordonieu - maker of shoes) and Anne Guingant were married in St. Michel's Church, Fontevraud L'Abbaye, August 21, 1691. Their children: 1693-Joseph, baptized in St. Michel's Church, Fontevraud, April 21, 1693. 1694-Jean, baptized in St. Michel's Church, Fontevraud, November 20, 1694. 1696-Marie, baptized in St. Michel's Church, Fontevraud, December 10, 1696.

1697-Marie, died February 11, 1697, Fontevraud.

1698-Marie, baptized in St. Michel's Church, Fontevraud, October 1698.

1698-Francois died April 14, 1698, Fontevraud.

In the afternoon, we visited the Church of St. Michel itself. The cornerstone of this church was laid in 1669. We took

many snapshots of the inside of the church. It is very beautiful and has many relics. We photographed the baptismal font where Michel and his siblings were baptized. Another photograph we have is of a plaque on one wall of the church, listing parishioners who died in the Resistance or in World War I (1914 - 1917). (All churches in the Loire Valley have a plaque, commemorating their dead veterans.) The plaque in St. Michel's lists two Leger's who died between 1914 - 1918. We then traveled to Nantes hoping to find information on the death of Michel in France or attempt to discover when and how and when Michel Prospere went to Louisiana. We telephoned a Marc Braud (who had been in touch with Ranson previously), as he had indicated he would help us if he could. However, when we contacted him, he did not have anything new to offer and did not know of the Fontevraud connection. Nantes, being a very large, very busy city was difficult for us to get to the Archives in the time we had, so no further research was done there.

On our way to La Rochelle, we stopped in the little village of Lege and had a delightful visit in the Office of Tourism. They told us that we were the first Americans to visit their office. We had taken along copies of information about the town of Lege that Ranson had sent us. It included a picture of the mayor taken a few years ago. When we met the Mayor, and showed him his picture and the newspaper article, he was amazed, to say the least. We had quite a chat there, and they promised to send us the background on the crest that the Lege village uses, as they didn't know what it stood for, even though they used it everywhere. We were told there were no Lege's living in that village either!

On to La Rochelle. We stayed at a Bed and Breakfast about 15 miles from La Rochelle, and, as it was Sunday, we went into the village of Marans for Mass. However, we had about an hour before Mass and decided to explore a tower, in ruins, that we had seen, beautifully lit up, the night before. Surrounding this tower, was a cemetery, which we canvassed, looking for a Leger name (which we had done, unsuccessfully, in several other areas, where we thought a Leger might be found). We did find three Leger's buried in Marans in 1919, as well as a Pinet grave. The tomb inscription read: "Famille Leger - Bonnaud". The Pinet tomb inscription was quite lengthy, about a Captain Pinet about 1919, as I recall. Perhaps someday, someone may find these bits of information useful in piecing together the Leger Family history.

La Rochelle is a beautiful, old, seaport city, and we walked the streets, wondering if Michel dit Richelieu had walked there as well, hundreds of years ago. We visited the Museum featuring France and the New World, but there was nothing at all there referring to the Grand Derangement at all. There were three floors of artifacts from French conquests in the New World. The only reference to the Acadians was a picture of L'Amittie" on one wall and a mention of the seven ships going to New Orleans. New Orleans itself was featured in one section, however.

We spent a good part of a day at the Archives in La Rochelle, going through death records on microfilm for La Rochelle, as well as Isle De Re, but found nothing on the Leger's. Perhaps research in Nantes or Poitier might reveal something.

Then on to Lourdes for a couple of days, and on to Cadenet, a little village in Provence, where we met friends from Napa, and enjoyed four days there.

Our trip home was a long one: 29 hours, Nice to Paris, Paris to New York, New York to San Francisco, San Francisco to Napa, but it was a trip of a lifetime!

Unknown to us when we went to France, another cousin, Jude Lege of Laguna Beach, California, left for France about a week after we did, for the same purpose. He has since generously shared his additional findings with us as well as with Ranson Lege.

All of these documents brought back by Jude and ourselves, were written by hand in the old European style of the 1600's; very difficult to decipher, but when translated painstakingly by Ranson Lege, our Historian, revealed many new details of these ancestors. Ranson has been collecting Richelieu Leger history for some years now. He is preparing an addendum to what he had already written, to include this new information on the earliest known Leger's. This treasure will be available to those attending the Richelieu Leger Family Association Reunion on February 17, 2001. Chapters will also be printed in each Association Bulletin printed from time to time, as a continuing series.

We are delighted to pass this information to all of you, in the hopes all Lege/Leger's can benefit from this information.