

THE HISTORY OF THE ISLAND OF ORLEANS

(by Amédée Blouin)

The Island of Orleans ...

To describe Isle d'Orléans properly, to try to do her justice, is a formidable task. I will not try to challenge such a task. However, as it is the birthplace of our ancestors, as it is on this island in Canada that the first Blouin was established and there still remain many of his descendants, I will attempt to provide some details.

Jacques Cartier traveling up the St-Lawrence River, and having put his foot down on this island, gave her the name of Bacchus (god of wine) because he found there to be a lot of grape vines. The following year, Cartier changed the name to Isle d'Orléons, in honour of the Duke of Orleans who had much interest in the New World. Before Cartier, the Indians had named this island "Minigo", a name that means land of division. This island, measuring twenty miles in length and five in width, is located in the middle of the St-Lawrence river, just downstream from Québec, which faces Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre and Chateau-Richer. Seen from afar, it gives the appearance of a lengthy and very wide "côteau". Due to the natural fertility of its ground, the island was cultivated to the fullest extent. Today it is a major horticultural center whose products are well known, especially the good strawberries, and sold in quantity in Quebec and even in Montreal. There is also a dairy industry that provides for the famous cheese called "de l'Île D'Orléans"

In 1759, during the seven-year war, the enemy, from May to September 18, occupied the Island. To better understand the situation for the inhabitants during this period, we have to remember that there was a great attack on Quebec City. The enemy fleet constituted two hundred vessels. It is safe to then assume that reaching from the Island of Orleans up to Sillery, the St-Lawrence was filled with ships. Several thousands men landed on the island and a fortified camp was established there. The parishes of St-Laurent and of St-Jean, as well as St-François were all seriously affected. Inhabitants from the island's parishes took refuge towards Ste-Anne and St-Joachim or behind the walls of Beaupré up to Charlesbourg. Historically, when an enemy army takes position, they requisition almost everything for the troops. It is likely it was no different on the island.

In a discussion about Isle d'Orléans, the Canadian historian, Marius Barbeau, has written in one of his articles ... "This island has been inhabited since the earliest of times. Its first colonists built stone houses and churches that are among the oldest on the Laurentien ground. Its population was always totally French speaking, without mixing origin, and many Canadian and American families come from ancestors that are represented on the island. The education and the refinement are more pronounced on the Island than in most of the City of Québec." During visits to the island and through searches, I have noted the same thing that Mr. Barbeau did. People of the island still live the old, peaceful way of the "French life" though they use modern tools and instruments. After conquest and the governmental reorganization which gave the country two legislatures, that of Upper Canada and that of Lower Canada, the Island of Orleans was a county attached to that of Lower Canada. The first deputy to represent the island was Mr. Nicolas Boisseau, elected in 1792. The third to represent the Island of Orleans to the legislature of the Lower Canada was Charles Blouin, from 1810 to 1820.

An Island of Wizards...

Its reputation as an island of wizards, encouraged by a writer from Gaspé through numerous songs, is not justified. For those unaware, here is how the legend started. During the early years, there was much fishing around the Isle of Orleans. Inhabitants of the island would fish or simply visit their fishing spot late in the evening under the light of their lamps. People residing on the other side of the river, who often saw these small lights changing places and intersecting between themselves, often hidden in the fog, started this legend, declaring wizards were walking around the island at night.

There are many old stone houses on the island with thick walls. Among these old houses, the Blouin families constructed many. The stone house constructed by Médéric Blouin was located in St-Jean, not far from the actual church; the house was demolished a few years ago. The houses of François Blouin and Emile Blouin remain intact and are still very solid. Under the French regimen, colonists (by hand) constructed carriages, small boats and “Goelettes”, a type of two masted schooner. The parish of Ste-Famille was the first to be organized in 1666 followed by St-Pierre, St-Jean and St-Laurent in 1679. In total, there are 6 parishes on the island.

In 1908, during the festivity surrounding the three hundred year anniversary of Quebec, the Isle of Orleans was honored and many families from the island were publicly honored in addition to the presentation of a commemorative medal to the oldest families of Canada. François Blouin, descendant of Médéric, received the commemorative medal for the Blouin family.

A belt road surrounding the island enables us to complete the tour of the island and at the same time admire villages, farms and the river. It is one of the best places to visit in Quebec. From the village of Ste-Famille, at its highest point, we can see Château Richer and the entire coast of Beauré, which takes shape as far as the horizon. Also, there is a very nice waterfall in Montmorency. At the left, you can see Quebec. It is a beautiful sight in front of us. From all we see, in front of us, it is like the past has emerged, trying to tell us an old story.

The Seigniorship of Isle d’Orleans ...

The company of New-France, through its royal charter had a stake in almost everything in New-France, which is today the Canada. On January 15 1636, the New-France Company set-up a seigniorship on the Island of Orléans and conceded it to Jacques Castillon, a middle class man of the town of Paris, for himself and jointly with Sieurs François Fouquet, Charles of Lauzon and a few others totalling in all, eight landlords. More interested in trading, the owners of the Seigniorship of the Island of Orléans did not bother themselves much with the colonization of the area and after having taken possession of it in 1638, they left the Island. Almost forgotten after twenty-five years, only about fifteen colonists remained established there. During the years 1662 to 1665, Monseigneur of Laval bought the rights from the eight landlords or their heirs. After having settled many other colonists on the Island, Monseigneur of Laval passed the rights to it, on April 24 1675, to Seigneur François Berthelot, advisor to the King in Paris and lord in New-France, who gave him in exchange, Jesus Island in addition to 25,000 pounds.

On February 25, 1702, Charlotte Juchereau, widow of François Pachot, bought the Seigniorship from M. Berthelot for the amount of 41,333 in French currency. Later, the Seigneuress of this Island was unable to pay for its purchase, and M. Berthelot, after a 7 years lawsuit took back this Seigniorship and sold it again on March 12, 1712, to Guillaume Gaillard, adviser with the Higher Council, who had already been maintaining the administration of it for a few years. In 1725, the Seigniorship belonged to his heirs.

The Origin of the Name BLOUIN and its Descendants ...

Going far back in time, our ancestors were part of a very large tribe, of Celtic origin, who while growing in size, extended and occupied most of the North-West of Europe. This tribe was made up of several tribes who spoke the same language with some minor variations. The Gallic were the most populated tribes and also the strongest for battle. Other important tribes included “La Gaule (Gallic), La Franconie (German), La Bretagne (Brittany), Le Poitou (French), L’Aquitaine (French), La Bourgogne (Netherlands) and La Flandre (Flemish)”.

The territory occupied by these mentioned tribes, was designated under the names of Gallic, Francic, Brittain, Poitou (originally Poictou), Aquitaine, Burgundy, and Flander. Later, all of these territories were merged into one and are now designated under the single name of France. During my research on the Blouin family name, which lasted many years, I have found the origin and the meaning of this name according to experts in etymology. (Vergine, Dauzat).

The name Blouin is of Celtic or Gallic origin and in the beginning was made of two separated words. “Blu” or “Blo” as today mean, “blue” or “azure”. And from the word “Ain” or from another source “Uin” mean, “love” or “loved”. So, in the beginning, there was “Blu Ain” and also “Blo Uin”. This meant those who loved/liked the azure, i.e. who loved the blue azure, either from the firmament or the sea. Later, with time and uses, both words were joined together giving the actual name of Blouin. So we descend from people who liked the azure or the colour blue.

Families of our ancestors were referred to under the name “Blouin of Poitou”. Their crest, with blue azure as the dominant colour, also comprised, amongst other things, a trained lion.

A Few Historical Notes ...

- These notes concerning the Blouin name were found in searching old documents.
- “One of the first to be established at the future parish of St-Jean, I.O., Médéric Blouin, constructed his stone house on a high point dominating the St-Lawrence River. He worked through the forest, creating for himself a field in the forest. He had 15 children who lived on the Island”
- The Captain Charles Blouin, a native of St-Jean, represented the county of Isle d’Orléans in the legislative government of Lower Canada from 1810 to 1820. He was the owner of an important farm on this island. Even though he only had an elementary school education, he was preferred by many scholars due to his great wisdom and good judgment. This sizeable citizen, so dearly remembered by the inhabitants of the island, rendered service to his fellow citizens and to his country and also acquired the regard of his colleagues within the legislature. He died at the age of 91. Even though blind since the age of 13 years, he was said to have kept his intellectual faculties until the last moment of his life. This Charles Blouin is the 4th generation, great grandson of Médéric.
- “Rivière-au-Renard in Gaspésie under the name of St-Martin. The first priest was the Abbot F. Oliva, from 1855 to 1858. The second priest was the Abbot J.B. Blouin, from 1858 to 1864”. This same J.B. Blouin was also a priest at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré during the time of 1870. In the transitory list of the Ste-Anne parish, and later at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, we can read the following: “In June 1872, the Abbot J.B. Blouin, threw the bases of the future basilica”.
- Grande Rivière and Pabos: The Abbott F.A. Blouin, priest of Grande-Rivière and Pabos

from 1867 to 1870. The name Pabos comes from the first French colonist who settled there and was pronounced “Pabo”. Later, the English gave it an English pronunciation of “Pabosse”.

- St-Joseph of Carleton, Bonaventure County: Formerly referred to by the Acadian refugees as “Tracadieche”. First priest, the Abbot Joseph Mathurin Bourg, 1800 to 1870. The Abbot F.A. Blouin, was the second priest of this parish from 1870 to 1895.
- Blouin Lake: In the canton of Senneville, this name was given to the lake in honor of M.A. Blouin, land-surveyor-geometrician, who drew the lines in 1906.