

The Fougères – Pioneer Family of Port Toulouse, Île Royale

Cape Breton, or Île Royale as it was known by the French, was the location of a trading fort built by Nicolas Denys in the mid-1600's. Continuous infighting among the French commercial community resulted in the post and fort being burnt. Construction of a new fort began in 1664, by the orders of Sr. Louis Tuffet, Commandant.

The resident native population, the Mi'kmaq, were never very far away and a relationship was developed between them and the French settlers. Port Toulouse, the eventual home of Jean Fougère and his descendants until the present day, was founded and developed just east of the canal connecting the Bras d'Or Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean.

Port Toulouse ("Potlotek" to the Mi'kmaq) was the main place of safety sought by citizens who feared escalation of the animosity between the British and French. The fort and village were burned about 1645, resulting in the deaths of some inhabitants and imprisonment of women and children. The Mik'maq were also victimized when their cemetery was desecrated, the crosses broken and burned along with bodies they had exhumed.

Port Toulouse – The Fougères

In the spring of 1756, the Port Toulouse residents felt war was a strong possibility and left the town, taking to the woods. By 1758, after the fall of Louisbourg, many of the former Port Toulouse residents were captured and relocated to French ports and/or English prisons. A great number did survive and were able to come out of hiding, return to Cape Breton and once again settle in Port Toulouse with their families.

One of Port Toulouse's early settlers was Jean Fougère. Born about 1685 in Pourpé-en-Beauce, Orléans, Chateaudun, Eure-et-Loir, France, Jean was the son of Jean Fougère, Sr., born about 1660 and Marie Barrè (1667-1689), both also of Pourpé-en-Beauce, Orléans, Chateaudun, Eure-et-Loir, France.

Prior to his residence in Port Toulouse, Jean had immigrated to Acadia in 1698, settling in Port Royal, and is shown in the 1698 Acadian census at Port Royal. His presence at Port Royal is also noted on February 5, 1709, when Jean signed a church register after attending the wedding of Claude Girouard and Élizabeth Blanchard in Port Royal.

The registers of St-Jean-Baptiste record Jean Jr.'s marriage on November 27, 1713 to Marie Bourg (1690-1727), daughter of Abraham Bourg and Marie "Sébastienne" Brun of Port Royal. Their children included Marguerite (1715-1715), Marie-Josèphe (1715-1715), Marguerite (1716-1752), Jean (1718-1727), Joseph Hylarion (1720-1790), Marie-Josèphe (born in 1723), Jeanne "Anne" (born 1725) and Charles (born 1727). The Acadians were noted for a high incidence of twins and Jean Jr.'s twin daughters Marguerite and Marie-Josèphe both died in infancy. Their next daughter, born in 1716, was named after Marguerite and another daughter born in 1723 was named after the second twin, Marie-Josèphe.

In 1713, after taking control of Acadia, the British demanded that all Acadians sign an oath of allegiance to King George I. Jean Fougère signed the oath in 1715.

In the years following the French worked to quietly induce the Acadians to relocate to Île Royale, and sometime between 1720 and 1722, Jean moved his family to Port Toulouse. The Acadian census of 1722 in Port Toulouse records the presence of Jean and his family and indicates Jean's occupation to be that of a navigator and fisherman. At the time of their arrival in Port Toulouse, the population consisted of 13 families comprising a total of 76 citizens.

The 1724 census of Port Toulouse shows Jean's family, and records him as an immigrant from Orléans, France who worked as a navigator. He is shown with his wife, two sons, three daughters, one servant and three "engages" and his personal property of one boat (geolette). "Engages", also known as "52 months men", were hired hands for whom the employer paid the passage from France. These men had agreed to work the contracted time in return for board. It is known that these "engages" were not always treated well or fairly.

The Port Toulouse census in 1726 shows Jean to have a fishing business employing eight engages. The latter three children of Jean and Marie were born after relocating to Port Toulouse. Shortly after, in 1727, Marie and their young son Jean died.

About 1728, Jean remarried to Marie-Madeleine "Madeleine" Belliveau (before 1718-1771), daughter of Jean Belliveau and Cécile Melanson. Their children included Madeleine (1730-1730), Madeleine (1731-1750), Judith (born 1733), Louis "dit Louison" (1734-1753), Marie-Louise "Isabeau" (1735-1765), Barbe (born 1736), Marie (1738-1752), Jean (1742-1813), Michel "Boniface" (born 1743), and Marie-Gervaise (1744-1752).

In 1744, news that France had declared war on England reached Louisbourg before any other North American port. Based on these reports, the Governor of Louisbourg decided to get an advantage and attacked and captured the English port of Canso. He also licensed privateers to capture English and New England ships under his authority. On June 11, 1744, Jean Fougère captured a British schooner near the

Canso islands with handwritten permission from the Commandant of Port Toulouse instead of the proper license, resulting in the confiscation of his prize.

It is known that Jean Fougère died before October 3, 1749 in Port Toulouse, as this was the date recorded on a document about the guardianship of his children. He was also named on a list of citizens who had died between 1749 and 1750, and left minor children in Île Royale.

After his death Marie-Madeleine married a second time to Claude Dugas. Claude was the brother of Madeleine Dugas, who later married Marie's stepson Charles Fougère.

It is believed the Fougères avoided deportation from Cape Breton after the fall of Louisbourg. They are not recorded on any documents concerning refugees of the time and it is likely they hid in the wilderness and were possibly helped by the Mi'kmaq.

Sources:

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