

SEARCHING FOR MY CANADIAN ROOTS

by

Clarence and Grayce Tourville

The search for my Canadian ancestors covered a period of seven years and included four trips to Canada. On the first of these trips, we left Bradenton, Florida, on October 10, 1968. At that time, we, as neophytes, knew very little as to what we might find since our information to date was a newspaper clipping dated November 4, 1907, from Chateaugay, New York, announcing the probate of the last will and testament of my great grandfather, Charles De Tourville. When we left Bradenton, we were fully determined to accomplish in a short time what well established genealogists fully recognize as a long term project, laced with obstacles but also many pleasant surprises.

The route we were driving took us to Roanoke, Virginia, where we spent approximately four days with our older daughter and her family.

The first contact in our search was made in Syracuse, New York, via telephone as we noted a Roy Tourville listed in the phone book. Mrs. Tourville was very friendly and interested but her husband was just the opposite and he didn't even know his grandfather's name, but thought that he was from Montreal. On looking back on this, our first contact, we figured that maybe he was so surly because he was afraid some inknown was trying to solicit a free meal and lodging.

The following morning we drove into Chateaugay, a typical small town with narrow streets and old buildings. We inquired of some workmen, who were digging in the streets, regarding the name Tourville. They directed us to the Catholic cemetery where we started the first of many "tombstone searches". We were lucky as we discovered in no time the Tourville plot. Then we proceeded to the residence of Msgr. Kelly who checked his church baptismal records. Here we picked up a few leads, none of which actually applied to my direct line. In fact, two names, even though Tourville, we have been unable to connect in any way. From the church we went to the town's only newspaper office where we located my great grandfather's obituary which gave his birth place as St. Anicet, and also the date as 1828. St. Anicet, we learned, was just across the border from Chataugay.

Arriving in St. Anicet, a small summer resort, we found that practically everything was closed for the season. Everyone we contacted we found to be very kind in answering questions and all referred us to Fr. Guerre.

We went to the residence of Fr. Guerre, but he was not at home. However, his housekeeper said he would be in later, so to wile away the time, we visited our second cemetery. No luck. We returned to the church, a grey stone structure, erected in 1888, and waited for the priest who finally arrived at about 5:30 p.m. Fr. Guerre was very apologetic about keeping us waiting. He immediately went through old records and found that the 1828's were non-existent. He explained that the priests in those days travelled by foot and visited the parishioners. Important data, such as births, deaths, etc. would be noted on small slips of paper and upon return to the church would be entered into the permanent records. To support his explanation, he showed us numerous

slips which had never been entered and also explained that due to fire and other causes, many of these slips from small churches were lost or destroyed. He advised us to go to the Palace of Justice at Valley Field and inquire as to their birth records which would not only have duplicate records of St. Anicet but other parishes as well. Fr. Guerre further extended a helping hand by referring us to a Rod and Gun Club for food and lodging which, though even partially closed, would assist us if we mentioned his name. At the Rod and Gun Club, as well as further contacts in Quebec we were faced with the language problem. However, some one usually spoke a little English and Grayce's high school French helped.

The following morning we arrived at the Palace of Justice and found that our interviewer was a young man whose sister lives in Bradenton. Here in the Palace we found that their 1828 records were missing.

By now we were becoming rather discouraged but decided to proceed to Vermont as we knew that my grandfather was born and married there.

Vermont as a state was beautiful at this time of the year. The people in most cases were very pleasant and cooperative. One exception was when the parish priest, even though he had decided to check his records for us, reneged when he noticed my Masonic ring. He then informed us that his records might be in the cathedral at Burlington.

We did discover some Tourvilles in Burlington, but after two days of tracing descendants, found that they were not actually Tourvilles but Travails. One of the brothers whom we contacted had studied in France, liked the name Tourville, and so had changed the name. With this information we figured we had enough for one trip, so we returned to Bradenton.

In August 1969 we set forth on our second trip east, as he had decided that since we seemed to be unable to gather any information on my great grandfather's parents that we would work toward the present generation and might possibly unearth worth while data in the other direction. At the Town Clerk's home in Chateaugay, we discovered that both of my parents as well as my great grandfather had been born in Canada. Through further contacts with the newspaper office, we were able to gather sufficient information on the descendant of my great grandfather to convince us that we should go to St. Anne de Beupre in Quebec Province and then to Lebanon, New Hampshire. We were able to pick up a will and inventory of the property of Charles De Tourville at the Surrogate Court in Malone, the county seat of Chateaugay, New York. This document proved to be very interesting.

The trip into Quebec Province proved to be rather futile except that we discovered several relatives which we did not know existed. These relatives, like us, were living under the illusion that they were direct descendants of nobility of the House of De Tourville in Normandy, France.

Our second trip through Vermont proved as futile as the first except that we were able to contact personally a genealogist to whom we had

written for information. We called Miss Wilkinson, the genealogist, who lived in East Calais, Vermont, and she gave us directions as to how to get to her home. We finally found the four corners she had told us to look for. There at the roadside stood a lady with a tall walking stick which she used as a cane. She was dressed in a crisp, prim dress and wore a heavy sweater. This was Miss Wilkinson. She got in our car and directed us as we drive down a very narrow road, then up an incline to her house. We walked through tall grass to the house and barn area. The house was a typical small farmhouse, old and rundown. The inside was very clean but cluttered. She told us that her father, Minister Wilkinson, had worked for President Franklin Roosevelt. She had been educated in France. Later she and her mother lived in Washington, D.C. After her mother's death, she bought this farmhouse, located in an area where she had always wanted to live. She seemed to be happy in this isolated place. She said that she hadn't done any work on my family, but promised that she would begin soon. She kept her promise.

Our third trip in 1972 proved as futile as our first two, but we did drive out of our way to visit a town named Tourville. It was a very small village. We took a picture of the grave of a man who had been a priest at Tourville. The graveyard was very small and not too old. We saw some workmen and asked them if they spoke English, but they all shook their heads. However, they did understand English and when we questioned them, were able to answer in a way. At this point, a man drove up in a car, and we found that he could speak a little English. He told us that no Tourvilles were buried in that cemetery. The village of Tourville was started in 1926 when it broke away from St. Perpetuie. St Perpetuie had been founded in 1869. Actually, Tourville was named St. Clement de Tourville, and no Tourvilles were involved.

We drove up the hill to St. Perpetuie, another typical small country town, but were unable to find anything. On our return to Tourville, we visited the Post Office. This Post Office was very small but in excellent condition and very clean. Two ladies were in attendance, and although neither could speak English, they became excited when we told them that our name was Tourville. We wanted to purchase postcards but they had none on hand, so we got twelve stamped envelopes, went to our car and addressed the envelopes to relatives in the States. We explained to the ladies that the post mark must be very clear and were amazed to see how carefully they stamped the letters. However, we forgot to address one to ourselves, and so on our return home, we wrote to them, requesting that they send us a postmarked envelope from Tourville, Canada.

Then we decided to go to the Parliament building in Quebec which is on the Grande Alle, a lovely new highway. We parked and asked directions from two young men, but they could not speak English. Just at this time a lovely young French woman approached us and said that she was an interpreter, and asked if she could help. She took us into the library. There she was told that we must go to the Archives which was located in the Museum. When we entered the Archives, we were followed by a guard and two French-speaking women who were able to speak English. We found that the Genealogy Department had just been

moved into a larger place. This department was on a very narrow street which was difficult to find. Here we met Mr. Auger, the Chief Genealogist. He was very helpful and spent over an hour with us, going through cards with the name Tourville and Arpleau, but to no avail. Then he advised us to return to St. Anicet and see a noted genealogist, Rev. Benoit Charette, at a school called Mount de L'Immaculee.

When we arrived in St. Anicet the next morning, we found the school to be a beautiful white building on a hill with a lovely white statue in front of it. I went into the building and soon returned to the car with a small man who got into the car and went to the same priest in St. Anicet, Fr. Guerre, whom we had met before. He recognized us from our previous visit. The two men talked in French, then the priest brought out old books of records of the 1800's that we hadn't seen before. We went through all these books, but again had no luck. Rev. Charette said that St. Anicet was the oldest parish in Quebec. The only other place he knew of for us to go to would be the Genealogical Department in Salt Lake City, Utah. We were somewhat discouraged when we left here.

We stopped in Shelbourne, Vermont, but found no Tourvilles and none in the cemeteries there. In the office of the town clerk we verified the marriage of my grandfather and grandmother, the date being 1870.

In October, 1974, after corresponding with several people whom we had met on our second trip, we received a copy of a birth certificate of a Peter Hubou dit' Tourville. This, we realized, was our first break. It meant that there had been a change in surnames. This certificate was sent to us by a lady in New Hampshire whom we had discovered to be the granddaughter of my great grandfather. She had spent some of her early childhood living with her grandfather.

After considerable research in the files of the L.D.S. Church, and the use of Tanguays Dictionnaire Genealogique des Famille Canadiennes which we discovered in the Tampa, Florida, library, we concluded that we must retrace our previous trips into Canada. We also realized that our method of research must be altered to include not only church records but also judicial records as well.

For those who wish to trace their ancestry in Quebec Province, be sure first, to read a copy of a one-page reproduction of "Researching in Quebec" by A. Phillips Silcox. This is now on file in the Bradenton, Florida, library.

On our fourth and final trip in 1975, we had the pleasure of introducing my brother and his wife to genealogy by having them accompany us. This necessitated setting a meeting place in Ohio, since they resided in Wisconsin.

Our first stop of interest was at West Point Military Academy where we had the pleasure of spending the night with a mutual friend, who at that time was in charge of Special Services. She gave us the elite tour for she was well steeped in the history as well as the physical layout of the Point.

Our second stop of interest was in Hanover, New Hampshire, the site of Dartmouth College. Here we got the birth certificate of my great grandfather from his granddaughter. Also from this charming aldy, now 86 years of age, we received considerable information about the descendants of my great grandfather. Since some of these descendants were living in Lake Placid, New York, and Dannemora, New York, we went, first, to Lake Placid. Even in 1975, Lake Placid was preparing for the 1980 Winter Olympics. Again, we remarked on how small a world we live in; our waitress in the new Country Kitchen was a young girl from North Carolina who told us that she had a sister living in Tampa. We promised to call on her on our return which we did.

From Lake Placid we retraced our steps to Chataugay, New York, and tracked down the original farm of my great grandfather.

In Dannemora, New York, the great granddaughter of our mutual great grandfather had done considerable work in compiling information about those of his descendants who had remained in Quebec and the eastern part of the U.S. This gracious lady loaned me, until then a total stranger, all of her notebooks for copying.

Our next stop was St. Hugues, Quebec Province, to see the village priest. He was conducting a wedding, but we found a pretty, blond girl who sought out the priest and made an appointment for us. Then she returned at the time of the appointment to see if she could be of further help. In the church records we found another brother of my great grandfather which gave the parent's name now as Hubou "dit" Tourville and the mother's surname as Arpajou, not Arpleau, as written in the obituary of Charles de Tourville in Chateaugay. Now we had the correct surname for research in determining the parents of my great grandfather. This we discovered in the Genealogy Section of the Public Library in Montreal where we saw a copy of the marriage of Charles Hubous in St. Jude. This was the connecting link which enabled us to trace the Tourvilles back to the 17th century, at which time they had first appeared in the New World. This was where we hit the "jack pot".

Before going to Montreal, we had proceeded from St-Hugues to St. Anne de Beaupré where we not only enjoyed the scenic tour of the beautiful cathedral but also were able to contact additional descendants of Charles De Tourville of Chateaugay. These contacts were also extended to direct descendants in Quebec where again we spent considerable time in sightseeing, enjoying every minute of it.

From Quebec we went to Trois Rivieres, Batascan, Yamachiche, Lachenay and Terrebonne. At all of these places, we stopped and searched cemeteries and records for we had learned from "Tanguays" the Hubous dit Tourville had lived there at different times. But we had no luck, except at Yamachiche where we were able to trace the surname Arpajou. Imagine, if you can, a small room, dusty old records in French, no one understanding English, faded ink and fancy scrolls made by the original priest, poor light - now you are in Yamachiche. By this time we were rather discouraged in our attempts to connect all the information that we had. However, the sun really shown after our research in Montreal. This was the final stop for genealogy.

From Montreal we returned to Ohio after stopping at Niagra Falls and the St. Lawrence Development (Eisenhower Locks).

As we look back on these trips, we are impressed now as we were at the time, by the fact that the French Canadian people were not only extremely courteous but also outstanding in their cooperation.

1. "dit". Roland J. Auger, editor of the French Canadian and Acadian Genealogical Review, vol. VI, no. 1, Spring, 1978, states:

"The name following 'dit' is a nickname, but with generations this nickname has become a name even though there is no legislation to that effect."

This explanation is fully supported when you study other established genealogists. For example:

"The Story of Quebec Family Bonhomme-Dulac" by Mrs. Cecil Dulac Pearson, published in the French Canadian and Acadian Genealogical Review, Vol. VI, no. 3,4, 1978:

"The Dulac name which surfaced when Nicolas Bonhomme the III inherited a section of land which contained a lake. This branch of the Bonhomme family which began to be known as Dulac started with this generation and continued on for one or more and became simply 'Dulac'."

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About the authors:

Clarence W. Tourville was born and reared in Wisconsin. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1932 with a degree in Civil Engineering. In 1932 he was employed by the Wisconsin Highway Division. In 1933 he received an appointment with the Civilian Conservation Corps as an Engineer and Camp Superintendent. In 1942, as a Reserve Officer, he was called to active duty in the Corps of Engineers. He was discharged in 1946 and recalled in 1950 to command a Construction Battalion. After leaving the service in 1958, he settled in Bradenton, Florida, where he was employed as Commissioner of Public Works and City Engineer, retiring in 1971.

In 1933 Clarence married his childhood sweetheart, Grayce Kidney, and was blessed with two daughters, Louise Yvonne (Mrs. George Silvanic) and Pené Sue (Mrs. Richard Stagner) and four grandchildren: Mark and Pené Silvanic, now residing in Palmetto, Florida, and Nicole and Kristi Stagner, living in Arvada, Colorado.