

Cornwall Township Historical Society

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Editor: Don McIntosh

From Quebec to Ontario: Migration and History of the Seymour Family in Cornwall Township

by: Jennifer (Lalonde) DeBruin

On April 12, 2014, a family reunion for the Seymour family, who had settled in St. Andrew's West, ON, took place in South Stormont. Having been organized for months, it was an opportunity to share what I had learned in my 12 years of genealogical/historical research with others who might be interested. Here is the story that was shared:

Let's go back...

Thomas Seymour, Blacksmith at St. Andrew's West beginning in the late 1800s, was descended from some of New France's earliest inhabitants. Born and baptized on 04 August 1851 at St. Joachim, Quebec on the Beaupré Coast of the St. Lawrence River, he began life as Thomas Théophile Simard, the son of Jean Baptiste Simard, a farmer, and Elizabeth Hervieux. The Simard family first came to New France in 1654 when Pierre Simard and his son Noël boarded a ship to start a new life in the French colony.

Originally from Angoulême, France, the Simard family had endured the devastation and resulting poverty and plague of the years after the religious wars that swept through western France in the 1500s, including the death of Pierre's own father in the latter years. Sensing opportunity in the new colony, Pierre and Noël embarked on a journey that would see the beginnings of the Simard family in Canada. Although Pierre and his son would return at least once to France, a document notes Pierre attended the marriage of a nephew in 1657, it is believed to be their last

trip back home. In May of that year, Pierre and Noël boarded the ship "Le Taureau," but Pierre's wife, Suzanne Durand, and their daughter did not follow. Believing the trip to be too dangerous, she never saw her husband or son again, and in her Will dated 27 October 1666 she states she is a widow. She must have known the separation to be permanent.

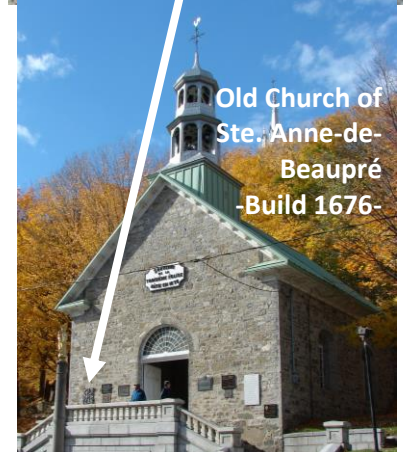


Thomas and Marcella Seymour standing in front of their house in St. Andrew's West, ON. This house still stands today.

Stone masons by trade, Pierre and Noël worked on several projects in the colony, among the most notable is the 3rd church of Ste. Anne-de-Beaupré, which still stands beside the much larger cathedral. A plaque honouring the contributions of Pierre and Noël, along with plaques of many other families (Racine, Paré, Boivin, etc...) connected to Thomas Seymour can be found in the area.

Noël married Marie Madeleine Racine at Château Richer in 1661. Her grandfather was Abraham Martin, said to be the first river pilot on the St. Lawrence. In the employ of the king, he lived along the bluffs at what is now Quebec City, on the now famous Plains of Abraham, which are named after him. Life in the new colony was difficult, and soon raising a large family proved financially taxing to Noël. After defaulting on a debt for land he had purchased, he received the aid of Monsignor Laval, the first Bishop in Quebec, in the form of overseeing property on which he could live while making it productive. For his work, Noël soon received his own

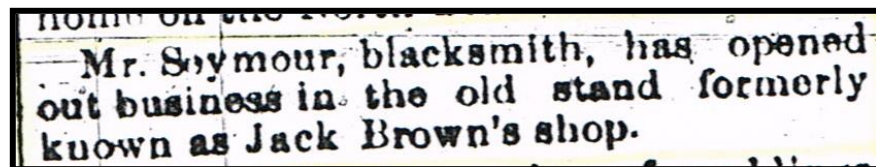
grant of land and was able to settle along the St. Lawrence River at what is now modern-day Baie St. Paul, Quebec. A plaque marks the place where Noël established his farm, as well as their inclusion on a notable memorial in the center of the town of Baie St. Paul honouring their first settlers. The Simard family certainly made significant contributions to Quebec history.



To Ontario...

From his death record, we know Thomas first settled in Ontario in about 1876. While no marriage record has yet been found, we know from other primary documents that his wife was Marcelline (AKA: Marcella) Sigouin (Seguin), daughter of Frederick Seguin and Scholastique (AKA: Christina) Brisebois, who also settled in St. Andrew's West, though both were born in Quebec. First establishing themselves in Osgoode Township, Carleton County, Ontario, the family had a number of children in that area, though it is interesting to note that their first child, Levina, was born in the U.S., said to be New York State by her descendants.

Eventually settling in St. Andrew's West, Thomas's death certificate states he had lived in the community since 1905, however, an 1891 newspaper notice seems to establish this timeline earlier.



The Freeholder
Friday, October 9, 1891

A particularly excellent description of Johnny Seymour and his blacksmith shop can be found in the **Cornwall Township Historical Society book: Historical Memories – A Collection of Newsletters by Marland and Pearl Murray**. The article entitled: *Blacksmith Shops* can be found on pages 97 – 100, and gives one a sense of the work and the people of the times. Thomas's son, William, established his own blacksmith shop and garage in the village of Moulinette. With the inundation of the Seaway and Power Dam project the village, and William's shop, was lost. Little evidence is left, except some say, the anvil which can yet be seen on the once floor of his shop when the water is low.



William Seymour Garage & Blacksmith Shop | Moulinette, ON | Circa 1920
William can be seen standing in the doorway under his shop sign

Of course many of the children of Thomas and Marcella Seymour went on to make a mark in their communities, including Cornwall's Chief of Police, Fred Seymour.

Thomas died 20 December 1933, St. Andrew's West, ON. Listed in the church burial record as the son of John Seymour and Elizabeth Herrieux, it seemed little of his French beginnings were evident by the time of his death. No headstone exists with the names of Thomas and Marcella Seymour on it; only a hand drawn map shows their resting place atop the hill of the St. Andrew's cemetery.

Why Seymour not Simard?

The Anglicized names are not uncommon in many family trees within SD&G. The change reflects a time when French families were migrating in larger numbers, often with family and neighbours from their Quebec hometowns/villages, onto new land in Ontario. To be fully integrated into their new home communities, they adopted the language of their neighbours, some yet speaking French in their homes, others instructing their family to learn and speak English at all times. Speaking with heavy French accents to their English neighbours, as evidenced by many a muddled transcription of what census takers heard, it shows a wanting to be accepted so that they might create a better future for the children, and ultimately descendants.

There is much debate in border communities (QC/ON) and beyond about the Anglicizing of the French families. In my family's experience, what I have learned through my research is that it appeared to be a choice that my Great-Great Grandfather, Thomas Seymour and his family and neighbours made. To strike out and make their way in new communities through hard work and determination, often with little in the way of resources to get them started - a mark of so many of the generations that have gone before.

In the End...

I have certainly come to realize through my writing and research that history is not a series of facts and figures, but it is about the people who lived it and what we can learn from their experiences; legacy is not about knowing who your ancestors are but ensuring you know the family they built – the people still here. In a couple of generations the Seymours had lost that. At the reunion on April 12th, as people began arriving at 11:00 am sharp, they made their introductions, tried to figure out who belonged to whom, and finally made their way to the very long wall full of the family trees and related biographies of a few 'interesting' ancestors. It was at this wall that I watched the faces of my relatives – strangers but moments before – look upon the names of ancestors and instantly 'connect' to their history. Conversations of the excited and curious relatives demonstrated to me that a common history – and those all important roots – need only the smallest nudge to once again flourish. Strangers instantaneously became family. I looked upon the faces of my great-great grandparents Thomas and Marcelline – their picture part of the centerpiece at each table – and I didn't need to hope I had made them proud, I knew this would have been the case in the absolute. They were proud of us all – we had all come together, perhaps unsure of who or what we might find, and with a handshake, a

hug, and many smiles, laughs and conversations, we had made manifest of their legacy – we were together again. I think to how love carries forward, how we live in the hearts and minds of those who love us, and that even in a hectic world that sees us scattered to the four winds, in the end, we somehow find our way home.

Query: The Seymour descendants do not have a picture of the Seymour Blacksmith Shop at St. Andrew’s West, and as such, if any member of the CTHS or community has a copy, it would be very much appreciated by the family to receive a copy. The author can arrange to pick up, copy and/or receive it in-person or digitally. jenndebruin@gmail.com Thank you in advance.

British Home Child Day September 27, 2014 in Athens Ontario

On Saturday, September 27, 2014, British Home Child Day will be celebrated in Athens Ontario. The Athens and Area Heritage Society in collaboration with the Ontario East British Home Child Family are hosting a full day of activities dedicated to British Home Children. The Home Boys who enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force to fight in World War I will be honoured. The medals, including the Victoria Cross, awarded to Private Claude J.P.Nunney for his service will be on display.

Events will be held in various locations in Athens. The Joshua Bates Centre and the Athens Museum will open at 9 am for the day with various displays all relating to Home Children. The opening ceremonies will commence at 10 am in the park. The Baptist Church will host various presentations throughout the day. One speaker will be the daughter of a Home Child, Joan O’Malley, who sewed the first Canadian flag. Other activities include walking tours, assistance with genealogical searches, children’s activities, music, and refreshments. The day will conclude with a dinner at the Cedar Valley Restaurant.

There were some 100,000 British Home Children who were sent to Canada from the United Kingdom and Ireland during the period of the 1860s to the mid 1930s. A large number of these children were relocated to rural communities in Canada through some 50 different emigration / immigration agencies. These young children, young ladies, and young men became productive members of Canadian society.

About 70,000 of these children were settled in Ontario. In their honour, Ontario enacted the *British Home Child Day Act* on June 1, 2011 designating September 28 as British Home Child Day.

Please join the Athens and Area Heritage Society and the Ontario East British Home Child Family on Saturday, September 27, 2014 to honour all the British Home Children who came to Canada. For more information and to make dinner reservations contact AAHS at henry.smid@sympatico.ca

CTHS members are asked to remember Mr. Edmond Beaudette who passed away in July at the age of 103. Our sympathies are extended to his family. Mr. Beaudette was a founding member of CTHS who, along with others, spent countless hours restoring the Heritage Centre. We thank those who made contributions to CTHS in his memory.

Next meeting of the CTHS

Our next meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 23 at the Heritage Centre. Plan to arrive by **7:15 pm** as the meeting will begin at **7:30 pm sharp**.



Guest speaker will be Mr. Robert Prowse, innkeeper and owner of Chesley’s Inn in Cornwall. Robert will give us the history of this historic building and explain how he turned this once dilapidated house into one of Ontario’s finest Bed Breakfast. Be sure to bring a friend along. Light refreshments, as always, will be served.