La Famille Poulain

The Story of our Poulin Ancestors in the New World

By

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Cover Painting: *Habitants* by Cornelius Krieghoff, 1852.

Introduction

According to the dictionary, 'poul' is a 5,000 year old root word meaning the young of an animal. In French Poulain, the original spelling of our name, means pony, a foal, a young horse. Two possible origins of the name are generally considered. One possibility begins during the Crusades and one earlier. Translated from French:

> *Our name was well known before the ordinance of 1539, dictated by Villers-Cotterets, which obliged priests to register the baptisms they performed. According to Paul Lebel, one finds in a written tract of 1144 in the general records of Paris the Latin form of Pullanus. In fact, a more remote person is known, Herve Poulain. Here is what is written on this subject:*
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> *In 1034, after the death of their mother, Havoise, her sons, Duke Allain III and Eudon, gave (for the salvation of their mother's soul) to the Abbey of St. Georges of Rennes the actual property of the deceased Duchess. There was living there a farmer named Gurdifen who upon seeing the management style of the Duchess and how distant she lived from the land, easily, and unobtrusively at first, took over her property and acted as if he had inherited it. The Abbess of St. Georges, outraged by his pretensions, and wanting to maintain her right of ownership, let Gurdifen know in no uncertain words that he would never inherit the farm. Indignant and outraged, he sought revenge by ravaging the property of the Pleubihan Priory. The Abbess had G. arrested and imprisoned for one year in the castle of one of her vassals named Herve (Harvey) Poulain: he is the oldest known person of the Poulin family to be recorded in history.*
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> *Of the other part (the second explanation), Grousset, in his book titled "The Crusades" relates the following: Near the end of the 2nd Crusade in 1095[1] the French knights went to the East to fight for the deliverance of the Holy Tomb of Christ and for the Christians oppressed by Islam.*
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> *Many of the knights married with the daughters of the country of Acre in Syria and their children were called under the name of Poulain or Polain by a group of French who refused to recognize the half-breeds as French. The attribution of the name of Poulain given to these children born of Syrians plunged anthropologists into an insoluble enigma according to Paul Lebel. What was it, for instance, the name Poulain that was designated by all the colonists of the Holy Land (Grousset page 26).*
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> *In the life of Saint-Louis, Jean, Sieur de Joinville, seneschal of Champagne (1224-1317) wrote: "They called me Poulain because I counseled the King to go to live with the poulains." Joinville wanted to dissuade the King from returning to France. According to Larousse, the Poulains were formed of people of the Latin States of crossing the Europeans and of the Syrian and Armenian Christian women.[2]*

The first account places the earliest Herve Poulain near Rennes in Brittany. The word "Poul" shows up in many place names of Brittany, and the people of Brittany, except possibly the aristocracy, did not speak French in the Middle Ages. They spoke the ancient Celtic known as Goidelic, also spoken by

[1] This is a mistake; actually this was the year in which Pope Urban II called for the beginning of the First Crusade. Michael Spilling, Ed., *Battles of the Crusades 1097-1444,* Amber Books, Ltd., London, UK, 2007.

[2] Bernard Poulin, *Bienvenue dans la Beauce aux Descendants de Claude Jean and Maurice., 26, 27, 28 June 1987,* page 15-16. This was a pamphlet written for a Poulin reunion at Beauce, Quebec,1987. The source notated in the text is A. Le Moyne de la Borderie in his *Histoire de Bretagne,* vol. III, page 116. This story is also paraphrased by Yvan Poulin, *Origine de L'Histoire des Poulin,* a typed manuscript printed at Sante-Marie, Beauce, June 1991, page 24.

the people of Wales and Cornwall. Goidelic is a cousin of Gaelic, which was spoken by the Irish and Scottish. Poulin may have another meaning in Bretagne (Brezeg) or it may be the same exact word as in French. I have yet to find a Goidelic dictionary. As for the Latin form of the name it was common since the early Dark Ages for nobles to have two forms of their name, one a local form and the other a Latin form. Since our ancestors who came to Canada were not aristocrats I tend to lean towards the latter explanation of the name and believe that one of our ancestors traveled to Outremer (overseas) and married a Saracen or Armenian woman. If our Crusader was a knight, a half breed would still be of noble birth. But I rather think our ancestor was a commoner, or a disenfranchised son of a noble, who somehow made his way back to France and thrived there. There are numerous cases of this occurring and it is said that people who have the word Moor incorporated into their name have Saracen/Moorish ancestry: Moore, Morin, Morris, Morrisette, Morrison, etc. The connotation of 'poulain' used as a euphemism for 'half-breed,' was that of a person who does not measure up, being a pony rather than a full horse. Leo Poulin, a cousin of our parents, found vague references to Poulain de Courval, Poulain de Quefferon, and Poulain de la Fosse-David who lived in or near Paris in the 1200s.[3] These would be Poulains who had retained titles of nobility.

There were eight separate unrelated Poulins (with various spellings) who came to Canada but the three main branches were from Normandie, Picardie, and Paris. The first to arrive was Claude, our ancestor, who is described in the main text. The second was Maurice, Sieur de La Fontaine, a purchaser of the king, born in the department of l'Orne, France, of the marriage of Pierre Poulin and Anne Plommelle. He married Jeanne Jallot in 1654 at Trois-Rivieres, a widow who had five children. She was living at the Ursuline Convent at Trois-Rivieres at the time. The third was Jean Poulin, son of Jacques Poulin and of Marie Violette, native of the parish of Meun in Picardie, diocese of Beauvais. He married Louise Pare in 1667, daughter of Robert Pare and Francoise Lehoux, of Ste-Anne de Beaupre. They had nine children; the descendants of Jean went to live at St-Joachim circa 1900.[4]

Whenever anyone is attempting to write about their ancestors there are many choices to make. One is tempted to describe each one individually, but this cuts the story up. We are not individuals, we are members of families. There are births, marriages, and deaths going on during each person's life. The second inclination is to just describe the family events. This is fine as a simple list of facts. But if we don't give the story some background of events going on at the time it seems they lived in a vacuum. For example Jean-Baptiste Poulin was married at such and such a time to so-and-so. This fact alone is important, but if we study the situation, in this case we find out that the militia, of which Jean was a member, was called out barely a week later. This adds some poignancy to Jean's marriage. There is some attempt at this in the original texts but I wanted to add more. Also I added maps and pictures. One difficulty in writing about the ancestors is that it can become a litany of births, marriages, and deaths since these are the only documents available most of the time. That's what happens in the latter part of the text. It's ironic that we know more about the earliest ancestors than we do about the later ones. In genealogical research we only find out facts: what, when, where, and who, but we almost never find out what kind of people they were, though some is learned by their accomplishments. We can't know what they liked or disliked, if they were content or angry, or if they played music or sang, or if they had a sense of humor – things like that. We can only generalize by events that were occurring at the time.

Throughout the text I refer to the British as English because that is what the Canadiens called them. They also referred to the New England Colonists as Bostonnais. I do not call them Americans because all people in the New World were Americans, including the Amerindians, English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Portuguese, etc. The British did think of their colonists as Americans but so did the French. Later, the

[3] Letter from Leo Poulin to David and Martha Poulin Kammer, dated December 12, 1988; courtesy of Solange Poulin Turcotte.
[4] Joseph-Philippe Poulin, *Troisieme Centenaire de la Famille Poulin au Canada, 1639-1939*, printed in Quebec in 1939, p 5-6.

people of the United States inaccurately took the term Americans for themselves because they could not call themselves United Stater's.

When dealing with a foreign language translation is usually difficult, and is even more so when one is not fluent in that language. That was my difficulty so there may be some mistakes herein. The other thing about it is that I was trying to write the story in English and in English there are no accent marks, so I did not use any accent marks anywhere. They are useful in French but they mean nothing in English and they clutter up the text and actually make it harder to read, though they do establish the "foreignness" of the word, but that is not very useful. And as an added bonus I could work much faster. I hope my French speaking relatives (and ancestors) are not offended. As a note of interest, it appears that none of our ancestors (the male Poulins anyway) could read until our fifth ancestor, Joseph Poulin, who was also the first to move from Beaupre to Beauce.

During the 16th century the English developed a style of bragging in which they appeared to themselves to be the victors even when they lost or when nothing was gained. They constantly employed depredations on the character of the enemy and praises for themselves in their writings. Americans still carry on this practice today and many events which are deemed as history are actually fiction or mostly fiction. This makes the research of the early periods difficult to do objectively. One example of this was a propaganda campaign by the English to downplay the character of the Spanish, so today, everyone says "the Spanish were cruel," when in fact the English were much more cruel to the natives. Incidentally, the British, having lost an empire, no longer carry on this practice and their newer histories are very objective. Another example is the diary of William Rogers. If you go by his account you will believe that his Rangers were invincible and could have conquered the world. But if you read factual French accounts or official British reports you get another picture, one of almost incredible incompetence. The truth is most likely somewhere in between but the historian has to try to guess which are the most reasonable facts. So whenever trying to research this time period it is good to find foreign accounts and cross reference what you read.

A word about the Iroquois because you can't talk about Canadian history without mentioning them – they formed such a part of our ancestor's experience. The French called them by that name but they called themselves Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse). In latter days the British called them the Five Nations. The five member tribes were Mohawk, Oneida, Onandaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The famous French explorer, Jacques Cartier, first encountered the Iroquois in July, 1534. It was a peaceful encounter. The next important encounter was in 1609. At that time many Algonquin natives lived along the riverbanks. Samuel de Champlain and his comrades befriended them through their fur trade. In the spring of 1609, a native chieftain asked him to accompany them on a raid against the Iroquois. In the interest of keeping his fur trade alliances he agreed. When the battle started Champlain and two Frenchmen fired their muskets, felling several Iroquois and immediately throwing them into total confusion. Fifty Mohawk were killed and twelve were taken captive. The Algonquin were ecstatic. However, the long standing and bitter feud between the Canadians and the Iroquois was begun. Many French Colonists would regret this occurrence.[5] That said, it probably would have happened eventually. Soon another factor had aggravated the Iroquois, the diseases the white men brought, to which the natives had no resistance. A third factor was the incessant instigation of the English who wanted Canada and the western portion of the modern United States for themselves.[6] A fourth factor was the beaver fur trade, a major industry of colonial America. The trade aggravated relations between the Iroquois who had exhausted their own beaver hunting grounds and their non-confederation neighbors. This led to the

[5] Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America, Volume I*, Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York, N. Y., 1983, 316-324.

[6] Michael Johnson, *Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2003, pages 3-7.

devastating Beaver Wars of the 1640s. In the early 1600s the Iroquois Confederation may have numbered about 16,000. But by 1700 the tribes were so decimated by constant warfare with their neighbors, that they could barely put 1,000 warriors in the field and half of them were said to be adopted captives. Circa 1722 the Iroquois were joined by another tribe called Tuscarora who became the sixth nation.

We cannot imagine the horrors of warfare in this period. Neither can we play it down and make things politically correct. Men, women, and children suffered alike. People were burned over open fires for amusement or to be eaten. Survivors were brought back to the Iroquois fortified villages and those not made to run a gauntlet were tied to a stake and then tortured by the women and children for their amusement. Some were made servants and a few were adopted into Iroquois families to replace lost family members. It's not true that the Iroquois and other natives only practiced 'ritual cannibalism,' the horrid truth being that they ate humans whenever they wanted to. In fact the eastern Algonquins called the one of the Iroquois tribes Mohawk, meaning "flesh eaters." It has also been established that Amerindians did not develop the custom of scalping from the Europeans. It was in practice long before they arrived. This style of frontier fighting was terrorism in the worst sense and we have no idea what it was like to live with it.

Despite difficult relations many Iroquois were converted to Christianity by the Jesuits and Recollets and relocated to missions in Canada. The Christianized Amerindians formed their own confederacy of seven tribes called Onontioga (meaning French Indians). These mission tribes were known as Algonquians, Abenakis, Oda, St. Francis, Becancour, Oswegatchie, Lorette, and St. Regis. In fact, the first saint of the New World was an Iroquois girl named Kateri Tekakwitha who died in 1680 at the age of 24. But most of these natives had only drawn a Christian veil over their original belief systems and they retained many of their ancient customs including the barbarous torture of prisoners, similar to the Iroquois Confederation. In contrast, most the eastern tribes including the Algonquians and Abenakis did not usually practice these customs and prisoners were generally incorporated into their tribes as slaves or as adopted replacements of lost family members. The Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries tried to soften to the treatment of prisoners by tribes under their charge while at the same time exhorting them to go to war with the enemies of France. They saw the English as heretics and the English saw them as Papists.

Je me Souviens

"Me I Remember"

The Quebec Province motto.

"Beau Port de Mer"
"Beautiful Seaport"
(march time 3/4)

A Saint-Malo, beau port de mer,
Trois gros navir's sont arrivés.
Chargés d'avoin', charges de blé.
Trois dam's s'en vont les marchander.
"Marchand, marchand, combien ton blé?"
"Trois francs l'avoin', six france le blé."
"Marchand, tu n'vendreas pas to blé."
"Si j'le vends pas, je le donnerai."
(repetez)

Trois gros navir's sont arrivés.
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"Marchand, marchand, combien ton blé?"
"Trois francs l'avoin', six france le blé."
"Marchand, tu n'vendreas pas to blé."
"Si j'le vends pas, je le donnerai."
"A ce prix-lâ, on va s'arranger!"

Refrain:

Nous irons sur l'eau, Nous y prom-promener
Nous irons jouer dan l'île.

Translation:
At the fine port of St. Malo, three big ships arrived,
Laden with oats and wheat. Three ladies came to buy some.
"Merchant, how much is your wheat?"
"Three francs for the oats, six for the wheat."
"Merchant, you'll never sell your wheat."
"If I don't sell it, I'll give it away."
"At that price, we can do business!"

Chorus: We are going on the water, We are sailing there,
We are going to play on the island.

This song reminds French Canadians of Jacques Cartier, the discoverer of Quebec, because it is about his home port of St. Malo; although it is a sixteenth century song, it is considered a patriotic song and is till a favorite in Quebec today.