

The Life and Times of Francois Violet

Address to VFA reunion
By Rod Violette
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Good Evening Cousins,

My name is Joseph Rodrigue Ronald Violette, son of Edgar and Ida Doucet, who was the son of Come and Flavie Cyr, he was the son of Francois and Sarah Mercure, the son of Theodore and Marie Louise Parent, son of Charles Armand and Theotiste Tardif, son of Francois and Marie Luce Thibodeau.

When I was a teenager, I knew those names as well as I do today because my father would drill them into my memory every chance he had.

When Rita Lippe began work on her book “The Descendants of Francois Violet” she sent a questionnaire to my father, who in turn forwarded it to me. That is when my association with Rita began and I became hooked on genealogy. When Rita published her book in 1984 I began entering the names into my computer, there are approximately 9600 names in Rita’s book. I have been at it ever since and have now accumulated some 37,000 individuals and 15,700 families in my database.

A few years back I was asked by the Violette Family Association to become the associations official genealogist, my reply was that I would try to maintain the genealogy data base but as far as I am concerned there is no official genealogist for the Violette family other than Rita Violette Lippe. She did over ten years of travel and research gathering information for her book, and spent a considerable sum of her own money to get it published. This gathering owes her a tremendous debt of gratitude, for without her these family reunions may never have happened.

With that said, I would like to recap for you a brief history of the Violette family in North America. Rita has written an excellent account in her book. Maurice Violette of Augusta has written a booklet on the very early history of Acadia, and of Charles, the father of Francois, and his legal problems in

Louisbourg. I would like to concentrate more closely on Francois, his life and times.

Lest I be accused of plagiarism, I would like to make clear that none of my information comes from any basic research of mine. All the information I have gathered I have read from books. Much of the information came from the two publications I just referred to. Some other important publications are:

“The History of Madawaska” by Fr. Thomas Albert;

“Van Buren, Maine History” by Martine Pelletier and Monica Dionne Ferretti;

“Madawaska Heritage” by Leo Cyr;

and the more recently published,

“The Papers of Prudent L. Mercure History of Madawaska”

Published in 1998 by The Madawaska Historical Society. These papers are a very important source of information. They are a compilation of some 2200 pages of manuscripts copied by hand by Prudent Mercure and later transcribed into book form by Roger Paradis. Many of these papers were the source of information for Fr. Thomas Albert when writing “The History of Madawaska”.

Some of these volumes can be purchased from the Madawaska Historical Society.

So let us begin.

Francois was born in Saintes, France on October 16, 1744. He arrived in Louisbourg, Nova Scotia in 1749 with his father Charles and mother Marie David. His father’s occupation was that of a roofer. His mother passed away May 26, 1751 (he was 6 years old). After the fall of Louisbourg in 1758, the LaRoche, France, records of April 28, 1759 show the arrival of Charles and his second wife Marie Sudois. But as the children are not listed we don’t know whether Francois, 14 years of age at the time, was with them. My guess is that he stayed in North America. Since Quebec had fallen in 1759 and Montreal in 1760 the English were in complete control of all of Canada. I doubt that there was very much traffic from France to Canada and it would have been very difficult for Francois to return had he gone to France with his father.

So, we are left to conjecture how a young 14-year-old Frenchman from Louisbourg ended up in New Brunswick with a bunch of Acadians.

I would like at this time to make a distinction between the Acadians of Nova Scotia, the French in Louisbourg, and the Canadians in Quebec.

The Acadians had settled in Nova Scotia since 1632. Since the purpose of colonization is to lay claim to the territory and return something to the mother country and since the Acadian colony was essentially self sufficient, trading primarily with Louisbourg, and in time of peace with New England, but having nothing to return to France they had basically been ignored for some time.

The fortress at Louisbourg was there primarily to protect the approaches to Canada and the fishing grounds for France. It was estimated that the cod fishing was capable of producing up to 2 million pounds income per year, France had about 900 fishing boats in the waters off the Grand Banks.

Fur trading was the major source of wealth from mainland Canada.

Even though Francois was strictly speaking (by my definition) not an Acadian, we his descendants are by every sense of the word Acadians. Francois lived with and endured the same trails and tribulations of the Acadians and he married into the Thibodeau family, one of the oldest in Acadia.

Time does not permit me to go into the causes and the blame for the Expulsion of the Acadians. But, I would like to digress a little here to give you a brief review of the history of the area and the events that transpired that influenced Francois life.

We all know the little rhyme that starts with “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean Blue”. Well, that year Columbus landed in the Caribbean and is credited with discovering America. In fact he was looking for a short cut to China and India. That is why it is called the West Indies.

America had been discovered long before, in about 1002 AD by the Vikings. Artifacts of their settlements in Newfoundland were discovered about 50 years ago, but those settlements were abandoned.

1497 John Cabot is credited with discovering Newfoundland and claimed it for England, but it was not colonized.

Fishing had been going on about the Grand Banks for hundreds of years.

By 1502 the Portuguese had established a fishing station in Newfoundland and were doing so well that special tithes were levied on cod catches by the Portuguese government

The Basques had long fished the waters off North America. By 1520 The Spanish city of Cadiz had 200 fishing boats in the area

1534 Jacques Cartier undertook 3 voyages of discovery, exploring the Baie des Chaleurs and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, eventually all the way to Montreal. Interesting is the fact that Cartier had captained fishing boats out of St. Malo to the fishing grounds before his commissioned voyages of discovery

1564. The Spanish founded St. Augustine in Florida, the first permanent settlement on the North American continent.

1604 Sieur de Monts, Poutrincourt and Champlain explored the Bay of Fundy. They along with 80 men spend the winter on an island at the mouth of the St. Croix River near present day St. Stephen. That winter they lost half of their party to exposure and scurvy. Had they read Jacques Cartier's logs they would have known how to avoid scurvy by drinking a tea made of the bark of certain tree (white cedar) the Indians called "Annedda or l'Arbe de Vie", something that the Indians of Quebec had taught Cartier some 70 years earlier.

1605. The next Spring Champlain and the remainder of the party explored the Bay of Fundy and built a small fort at Port Royal and establish a habitation there.

1607 The English found Jamestown, in Virginia.

1613 Capt. Argall of Virginia sacks Port Royal. Already the fighting between the French and English had begun and would last until the fall of Montreal in 1760. Most of the survivors return to France except

- for a small group under LaTour who remained and lived with the Indians in the Cape Sable area.
- 1620 Pilgrims land at Cape Cod and the colonization of New England began.
- 1632 France regains possession of Acadia, and sends 300 troops under Aulnay. Germain Doucet, (one of my mother's ancestors) is the Captain of Militia).
- 1636 Over 60 families arrive from France and settle at Port Royal and the Annapolis Basin, eventually spreading to the Minas Basin and Beaubassin.
- 1654 Sedgwick of New England captures Port Royal. Germain Doucet and Garrison are returned to France.
- 1667 Acadia is again returned to France.
- 1689 England declares war
- 1690 Settlements along the Bay of Fundy pillaged.
- 1697 Acadia again returned to France.
- 1702 War again declared.
- 1710 New England attacks Port Royal with 3400 troops, against 156 defenders who surrender after 3 attacks.
- 1713 England given possession of Acadia (for the final time) except for Ile Royal (Cape Breton) and Ile St. Jean (PEI).
- 1714 Fortress Louisbourg constructed.
- 1744 War resumed.
- 1745 Louisbourg falls to New England.

- 1748 Louisbourg returned to France. The French decide to improve and enlarge the fort. This is the event that creates the opportunity for Charles (father of Francois) to come to New France.
- 1749 Charles and his family arrive in Louisbourg.
- 1750 Beaubassin abandoned and burned. Refugees encouraged to go to PEI and New Brunswick, including the St. John River. Fort Lawrence built.
- 1755 The English decide to get rid of all the French in Canada. They start by deporting the Acadians, rather than allowing them to flee which would have strengthened the French in Quebec and Louisbourg. Deportation begins in the Beaubassin area. Over a seven-year period some 14,000 are deported to the colonies or imprisoned in Halifax or England. By 1763 only 1500 remain in Nova Scotia. Some 3000 to 4000. Were able to avoid capture and make their way to PEI or north to NB and the Baie des Chaleurs area
- 1758 Louisbourg falls to the British under Gen. Wolfe.
- 1759 Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Quebec falls to Gen. Wolfe.
- 1760 Montreal falls. All of Canada now permanently in English hands

So let us now resume our search for Francois.

Why did Francois end up in New Brunswick? Perhaps, fearing the same fate as the Acadians who were exiled to the colonies or imprisoned in Great Britain when Louisbourg fell to the British in 1758, Francois may have decided to slip away and join some 3-4000 Acadians who evaded the British and escaped north to PEI, Memramcook, Peticodiac, Mirimichi, and Caraquet, Baie des Chaleur, and Gaspé as well as the St. John River area.

Acadians had been aware of the St. John River area since the time of Champlain. Many forts had been built in the area. One of the first was Fort Jemseg built about 1632 by Latour. It is located a short distance south of Fredericton on the east side of the Saint John River.

We know that Francois, along with other Acadians, made their way to The Saint John River area, eventually settling on the Hammond River, a short distance from the Kennebecassis. They may have been chased off the St.

John River by the raids of Monckton, Hazen and Studholme between 1758 and 1763, and settled on the Hammond River because it was off the beaten track. Not once did the raiders of the St. John River mention a settlement on the Hammond River. These raids were not just minor harassments, they were meant to destroy all property, both houses and animals, and in some cases resulted in the loss of life for the settlers.

The signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 did not resolve the problems for the Acadians, as they did not have title to their lands. They were still squatters on English soil.

When Sir Andrew Hammond was granted land in the Kennebecassis area in 1782, mention was made that it included a French settlement of 15 families that had existed there since 1768. So we have a period of ten years in during which we have no record of Francois whereabouts. He is now 24 years old.

Francois' name first appears in 1769 on the payroll of Simonds and White, the founders of the first permanent English settlement at St. John. He was employed, along with other Acadians, diking the marshes east of the city, something at which the Acadians were quite skilled. The same Acadians were also engaged by the English at Fort Howe (St. John) cutting masts for British ships. In 1782 Francois had an account with Hazen & White, merchants of St. John. There is an entry for the purchase of some chocolate. (I didn't know that St. Valentine's Day was celebrated that long ago).

The next trace of Francois appears in 1770 on the marriage records of Fr. Bailley. On May 6, 1770 Francois married Marie Luce Thibodeau. This was undoubtedly a reconstituted marriage as their first child Marguerite was born Jul 25, 1770.

This brings up some interesting statistics regarding the pre-marital sexual habits of the early Acadians. The *Acadiensis Reader* Vol. 1 page 22 states that in early Acadia the average interval between marriage and the first child was 15 months. Between 1702 and 1730 only one instance of an 8 month premature birth is recorded. During the entire period between 1702 and 1755 only 0.6% of births (that is 6 in 1000) were illegitimate, and those occurred mostly prior to 1710 due to the presence of the French garrison. (You know women just cannot resist men in uniform)!

In 1783 the British Empire Loyalists, those British subjects who had remained loyal to Great Britain during the war of Independence, began to arrive from the States. As many as 30,000 settled in New Brunswick. They were granted the lands that the Acadians had settled on and improved.

On Jun 21st 1785 the Acadians from the Ste. Anne (Fredericton) area were given a license to occupy lands in Madawaska later known as the Mazerolle Concession. After a ten-day canoe trip up the St. John River, the first settlers arrived in what is now St. David, (Madawaska) the last part of June 1785. The Madawaska Historical Society celebrates the anniversary of that event every year.

In 1786 the Hammond lands passed into the hands of the Loyalists who immediately dispossessed the Acadians living there. Fortunately two Loyalists, Edward Winslow and Ward Chipman took up the cause of the evicted Acadians and obtained from the government the restoration of some of their property. On April 12th 1787 grants of land were made to 15 Acadians and 27 Loyalists. The lots were awarded such that the Acadians were dispersed among the Loyalists. Francois was awarded lot # 14 containing 210 acres.

The Acadians on the Hammond River must have been satisfied with their lot for some time, because they did not move north with the original migration in 1785. Not until Aug 28, 1789 did they apply for land grants in Madawaska. On Dec. 21 1789 another request was made, this time for land below the Madawaska settlement. On Dec 24th their request was approved. This grant was later known as the Soucy Concession and extended from Green River south to the Grand River on both sides of the St. John River.

I would like to mention here some of the conditions attached to these grants of land. The settlers were first given licenses to occupy the land then later, if the conditions of the grant were met, they would then be given title to their land. Grants generally consisted of 200 acres on about a 1000.ft front. First concessions fronted on the river.

Conditions:

- a) Payment of 2 shillings per 100 acres annually, (about one day's wages) due Sept. 29th.
- b) Erect one good dwelling to be at least 20ft by 15ft. within 3 years.

- c) Clear or drain three acres for every 50 acres of plantable land
- d) Have 3 head of cattle for every 50 acres.

It took the early settlers about 12 years to become self-sufficient.

Early shelters consisted of cabins about 18' X 25' 1½ stories high built of squared logs. The ground floor was of rough boards of hewn spruce. The upper floor was made of straight poles and seven feet high. There was a fireplace built at the center of the house. In front of it was cut a trap door which opened into the root cellar. All the rudimentary furniture and farm implements were carved by hand out of the surrounding forest.

On Jan 15 1790, Francois, probably not knowing that their request for lands in Madawaska had been granted, entered into a contract to purchase lot #15 adjacent to his property for 100 pounds. (About three year's wages). This money was borrowed from Henry Darling of Saint John.

An interesting aside is that Francois' signature appears on this contract, but not on the request for the land grant in Madawaska. The Mercure Papers indicate that he signed with an X. I see no reason why Francois was not able to sign his name, having grown up in Louisbourg from the age of 5 to 14, he must surely have attended school there.

It is interesting to note that after the French defeat in 1710, the Acadians were allowed to retain only a few priests, and the Nuns were returned to France. Education essentially came to a halt. Nor was there much incentive to get an education because there was no chance for an Acadian to attain even a minor position in the British government or military without changing his religion. After 1745 not one man or woman was able to sign their name on their marriage certificate.

We do not know how much Francois received for his two lots on the Kennebecasis, or why he decided to leave. Perhaps it was the lack of opportunity to practice their religion or that they missed their friends that had departed for Madawaska. Legend has it that they were harassed by their loyalist neighbors having their fences torn down and their root cellars opened during cold weather.

Nor do we know exactly when Francois arrived up river to settle in what is now known as Van Buren, ME. However we do know that Francois and his

family of 12 children were settled in the Madawaska region by 1791 since his son Alexandre, who was born Sept. 29 1789 at Kennebecassis, was baptized on Jun 23, 1791 at St. Basile.

1791. Francois erected a gristmill on Violet Brook. He probably used the proceeds from the sale of his two lots on the Hammond River to finance the construction. The property changed hands many times but a mill operated on that property until the 1950's. The settlement that grew around it was called Violet Brook. It wasn't until the 1840's that it became known as Van Buren.

The Violet family was involved in every aspect of the developing community. Francois was a commissioner of highways (not that they had that many roads). The first carriage road from Fredericton was completed in the 1850's).

His son Francois Jr. was a Captain of Militia 4th Battalion York County.

His grandson Belonie (s/o Francois Jr.) Was on the Board of Assessors, a County Commissioner and served as a State Representative in Augusta. Belonie also sold the land that the present church is built on to the diocese for \$200.00 and in 1871 contributed \$800.00 for the construction of the altar. Belonie's son Frederic and grandson Neil also were State Representatives.

When Van Buren was incorporated in 1881, At least five Violette's appear as elected officials of the town, some occupying more than one position.

One of our more illustrious relatives was Elmer Violette of Van Buren who was a State Senator and later a Justice of the Supreme Court of Maine. Another was Dr. Lorne Violette of St. Leonard who served on the New Brunswick Legislature.

My great-grandfather Francois was the postmaster and first customs officer at the new international bridge when it was built in 1910. There are many other successful businessmen and farmers such as Fred Violette of Violette Motors and his descendents who still carry on the business today. We also have a few infamous, notorious relatives, the most interesting I think is Albenie Violette of St. Leonard also known as Walnut Joe who ran a rum running operation during prohibition. Having been raided several times by authorities he set about to get even with the government. Having been alerted of a possible raid he cashed eight barrels of whiskey in a strong room

in his hotel. The government seized the barrels and put an armed guard outside the door. Unknown to them Albenie had a secret entrance to the room, exchanged the eight barrels of whiskey with identical barrels filled with water. The agents took the barrels to Fredericton to be used in the trial against him. Albenie beat the charge of bootlegging by producing evidence of possessing a license to sell medicinal medicine. Then he insisted that the government test the contents of the barrels, of course they found only water. He then sued the government for the loss of the whiskey and received \$8,900 dollars for the loss of his whiskey

So you can see that from the very beginning Francois and his descendants were influential and active members of their community whether they were in the French-Canadian or Anglo-American environment. We can all be appreciative and proud of the legacy that Francois left us.