



*The Patchwork
of Your Ancestry*



The cover shows a Crazy Quilt made from various salvaged scraps and pieced together by one of your ancestors*. It's a great allegory for all the different scraps in the crazy quilt story of your ancestors, stitched together through time...and you are a piece of that quilt.

I've selected some of your ancestors that faced challenges or opportunities that must have seemed daunting and scary at the time. But they made decisions that changed the trajectory of their lives, and because of that, your life. Because of their decisions, you are the person you are, living where you are, and speaking the language that you do!

There will be times when you feel challenged in life or are at a crossroads and are unsure what to do.

Read on and be inspired by your ancestors that made difficult choices, guided and inspired by their deep Christian faith.

Some of these ancestors stepped foot in the New World of North America as early as 385 years ago and they have incredible stories that can be found in the records that were kept.

These ancestors are from Grandma Mae Rousselle Serns Bellard and her husband Clyde Serns. This book was written for the great-grandchildren of Mae and Clyde Serns and to be enjoyed by other family members. I've also included the story of Mae and my grandmother Rose, who, in their own right were heroes.

Therese Seidel Oldenburg – December 2024

** The Crazy Quilt on the cover was made by either Josie McEnroe, a relative who took care of Mae Rousselle when she was a baby, or Josie's mother Lucy. Lucy was known as a skilled seamstress and was sister to Mae's father John. Josie and Lucy are pictured to the left with little Mae.*



Pioneers and Founders of Montreal, Quebec

Blaise and Anne were among the brave people who left their homes in France for new opportunities and adventures in New France. They are among the first of your ancestors to step foot in the new world starting in 1644.

Blaise Juillet-Avignon | Birth 26 FEB, 1611 • Avignon, France | Death 19 APRIL 1660 • Montréal, Québec, Canada

Anne Antoinette De Liercourt | Birth 1634 • Beauvais, France | Death 30 SEPTEMBER 1707 • Montréal

Your 11th great-grandparents

How connected? Their daughter Marie Juillet married Pierre L'Écuyer. Grandma Mae's grandmother was Matilda Lecuyer who is buried in Aurora, IL

Blaise and Anne Antoinette's Story

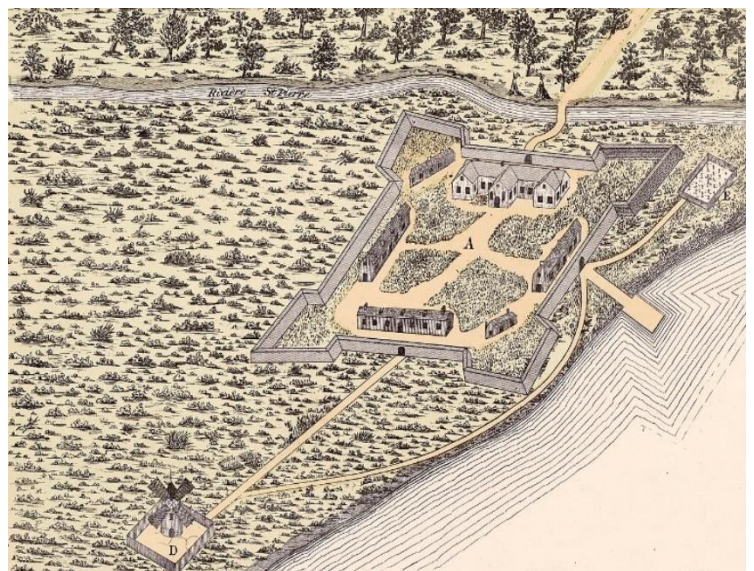
Blaise was baptized Feb 26, 1611 in at the church of St-Agricol in the city of Avignon, son of a butcher. In 1644, when he was 33 he was among the select group of men recruited to work in New France as laborers (a digger), to help build the Fort of Ville-Marie (later became Montreal) in New France for a 3-year contract for Governor Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, founder of Ville-Marie. It must have been an exciting opportunity for him, a chance to make good money and a great adventure in the new world! He must have been a good worker, as he obtained 30 arpents of land in Ville Marie in 1650. Perhaps as a reward for agreeing to stay. This land made him more attractive as husband "material". He married Anne Antoinette de Liercourt in 1651. Anne was a *filles à marier*, (*Girls to Marry*), girls who came to New France for opportunity and to marry. Unlike the later Kings Daughters, she did not receive money to come settle new France.

So why would **Anne Antoinette** want to cross an ocean and take these enormous risks? In

France, women did not have a choice in who they married. Arranged marriages were the norm in all classes of society, with the bride's family expected to provide a dowry. IF there was no dowry, her only other options were to become a nun or work as a servant. In New France she could have more of a say in who she married.



Blaise was baptized here on Feb 26, 1611 in at the church of St-Agricol in the city of Avignon, France.



Fort Ville-Marie in 1645

Anne Antoinette likely signed a contract in France to work as a servant. It was understood once the contract was over was marriage and settlement was expected. Once the contract was signed, Anne boarded a ship for Quebec, from Dieppe, France. She likely traveled alone and endured a ship voyage of at least 6 weeks, sleeping in extremely cramped quarters in the ship's hold and conditions were far from hygienic, especially when people were overcome with sea sickness. Almost 10% of passengers died on their way to New France.

During the time that Anne and Blaise arrived in the new world, there were continuing battles between the French and the Iroquois. Raids upon the fort and homes by the Iroquois were frequent and terrifying. On April 19, 1660, Blaise was involved in a skirmish with the Iroquois with other men and drowned trying to flee from them on Saint Lawrence River. His body was never found. He left Anne as a young widow with four young children in this wilderness. So, it is no surprise that she quickly remarried one month later to Hugues Picard and had 6 children with him. She died when she was 73, leaving a sizable estate for her children.

Pierre L'Écuyer

Birth 1633 • Poitou, Poitou-Charentes, France | Death 1707 • Montréal, Québec
Your 10th great-grandfather

How connected? Grandma Mae's grandmother was Matilda Lecuyer who is buried in Aurora, IL

Pierre was the first Lecuyer to arrive in New France (Canada) before 1666. He married the daughter of Blaise and Anne Julliet, Marie Juillet, in 1670 and had at least 10 children with her. They are considered Pioneers of Montreal. Their son René is listed on this document as a Voyageur and there is some indication that Pierre may have been as well. Their children were baptized at Notre-Dame, Montreal, the oldest church in Montreal and that is where Pierre, and probably Anne, are buried.

Gabriel Gosselin

Birth 1621 • Combray, France | Death 7 JUL 1697 • Quebec
Your 8th great-grandfather

How Connected? Grandma Mae's mother was Annie Gosseline and they lived in Aurora. Annie's brother John Gosseline moved to Beloit and was one of the founders of Beloit Foundry in 1900 along with Jackie Oldenburg's grandfather, Henry Gau. John also founded Taylor Freezer in Rockton and the Beloit Boat Club. Grandma Mae lived quite often with John Gosseline, as her mother died when she was born and was often bounced between relatives.



Gabrielle's Story: He was born in the small farming town of Combray, Normandy, France during a time that famine, plague and poverty reigned. The death of close relatives encouraged him to leave for the new continent. He appears to have come about the same time (1640-1650) as your ancestor Blaise, but was more well off than Blaise (who was a laborer). When he arrived, he was listed a servant of Éléonore de Grandmaison, a rich woman who was the first to settle in New France. He must have been quite the entrepreneur, because he was soon settling on his own land Île d'Orléans in 1652. He is listed as "bourgeoisie", who were characterized by their properties, riches, honorable employments, and commerce.

Gabrielle became the largest landowner on Île d'Orléans and over the years, he amassed 7 farms on Ile d'Orleans. You can visit **Ancestors Park on Orléans Island** where there is a memorial there with his name and you can find out [more info](#) here.

In addition to farming, he also owned a home which was also possibly a business on Sous le Fort St. in Quebec, now one of the most famous and scenic historic streets in Quebec. In 1676 he built a larger 22 x 20' house with 2 floors and a palisade bordering the St. Lawrence River at 21 rue Sous-Le-Fort. His home is still located in historic, old Quebec City and is now a restaurant called Rafaella Ristorante. This is the home where he died aged 76.

In 1684, when he was 63, Gabriel was stricken with paralysis and he turned to his Catholic faith for healing. He was well aware of the miracles that had been performed by prayer and petition to St. Anne at Petit Cap Church since 1662. This church was just across the St. Lawrence River from his farms on Île d'Orléans. He credits his prayers and petitions for intercession to St. Anne for his healing. This cure is related in one of the minutes of the Record of Miracles by the "Good Sainte-Anne". *Petit-Cap, a small village located on the St. Lawrence's Beaupré Coast, was at the center of a curious series of events in 1662 when clerics at the parish of Saint-Anne-du-Petit-Cap recorded over thirty-three cases of miraculous intercession. These miracles, experienced by people of all ages and wealth, ranged from miracles of healing from blindness, lameness, safe childbirth, and rescue from danger. Word of the miracles at Petit-Cap*



Sous le Fort St. in Quebec, now one of the most famous and scenic historic streets in Quebec



His home where he died aged 76 is at 21 rue Sous-Le-Fort is located in historic, old Quebec City and is now a restaurant called Rafaella Ristorante.

quickly spread throughout the valley, and people from nearby communities journeyed to the parish to see if they, too, could be healed by Saint Anne.

Gabriel Gosselin, resident of the Island of Orleans having become paralyzed as it were, of the neck and arm, being hardly able to raise his head and turn around, having made a vow to Sainte-Anne, has been healed and continues every year to go to her Petit Cap Church as his act of grace, her thanks and praise."

Gabriel gave an endowment to the church for five masses at the Quebec Cathedral, to be dispensed as follows: one mass on January 10, at the Sainte-Famille altar; one on the eve of the feast of Sainte-Louis, King of France; a third on March 16, his patron's feast day; one on the Tuesday, and a fifth on the Wednesday of the first week Lent. In his last will of July 4, 1697, He ordered 600 masses said for the repose of his soul.

He was buried in Notre-Dame de Québec Basilica-Cathedral near his home in a common ossuary under the church where his bones are comingled with about 900 other people.

Gabriel is considered one of the most influential founding men of Quebec and you can be proud to be among his ancestors. You can learn more about the Gosselin family [here](#).



Mother Of New France

Jeanne Barbier

Birth 1 AUG 1648 • St-Nicolas, Rethel, Reims, Champagne, France

Death 2 JUN 1689 • Chambly, Quebec, Canada

Your 10th great-grandmother

How Connected? Jeanne's descendants can be traced to the Lecuyer family line to Grandma Mae's mother Annie Gosline who is buried in Aurora, IL. Jeanne's daughter married René L'Écuyer, who is featured in the Voyageurs section.

Jeanne's Story: When Jeanne was born in 1648 in the small town of Rethel, France just outside of Paris, there was a battle raging between the French and the Spanish in her town. After a 4-year siege it was captured by Spanish forces, but was retaken by the French in 1653 when she was 5 years old. It had to have been a difficult life for her family to live in among this.

In 1663, When she was 15, King Louis XIV of France decided to adopt a plan to establish a better foothold in the new North American Colony of Quebec. At the time there were about 800 people living there, and most of them were men. The King's plan was to encourage single or widowed young women to go to Quebec, marry one of the single men there, raise a family and establish themselves as permanent colonists. Compared to France the New World was harsh, with the lack of amenities, the danger from the Indians, harsh winters and its isolation.

Jeanne might have heard about this plan when her parish priest announced the King's program from the pulpit. The young women were told they would be doing "a good service for God and their

country" to go to this primitive land and marry the single men of Quebec. Those girls that were chosen were provided their cost of passage from France and each received a hope chest with personal items which also included practical items, thread, needles, pins, comb, scissors, knives and some cash, among other items. They were provided suitable clothing and provisions upon their arrival in Quebec.

A King's Daughters

So, when she was 21 Jeanne weighed her options and decided to become one of the famous **King's Daughters** (Filles du Roi). There were the 800 young French women who immigrated to New France between 1663 and 1673. There are amazing records that have been preserved about the King's Daughters and you can find Jeanne's name among the records.

Jeanne left her home in the Champagne region of France in May 1670 and sailed with 120 other women ages 12-35 on the ship *La Nouvelle France*. She had goods estimated at 50 livres plus a gift from the king of 50 livres. (maybe about \$14,000 in today's money). She arrived about 60 days later in Quebec on July 31, 1670.

Jeanne's first marriage contract after she arrived was cancelled. Every Filles du Roi had the right to refuse any marriage offer that was presented. To make an informed decision to accept a would-be husband, the girls asked questions about the suitor's home, finances, land and profession. Having a home of one's own was one of the most important considerations for a Filles du Roi. "The smartest among the possible suitors began constructing a home at least one year before getting married, because those with a home could find a wife much easier. It's the first thing that the girls ask about since those who married one of the single Canadians without an established home would suffer greatly before being comfortable." After agreeing to marry, the couple appeared in front of a notary to have a marriage contract drawn up, and the wedding ceremony generally followed within 30 days.

Many made hasty contracts of marriage, only to shortly break them and then make new marriage contracts with another bachelor, trying to make better marriages. Perhaps that is what Jeanne did with her first marriage contract.

In addition to any dowry of goods brought with her from France, each newly married couple was given an ox, a cow, 2 pigs, a pair of chickens and 2 barrels of salt meat to start them off in married life. They were also rewarded with additional allotments for the number of children they had. If they had ten children the government gave them a yearly allotment of 300 livres, 400 livres was given for 12 children; an even larger allotment for 13 or more children was given. This was a lot of money for that period.



In 1663, France sent 800 women, known as the "Filles du Roi" ("Daughters of the King"), to Quebec to marry settlers. This initiative was successful and doubled the population within ten years. Today, two-thirds of the French-Canadian population can trace their ancestry back to these women.

Jeanne found a suitable mate not long after her cancelled contract she was married later that year and that marriage produced at least 5 children over 10 years until her husband died. She then married François Blain and their daughter Suzanne produced our Lecuyer ancestors. It is believed that every American with French roots in Quebec, Canada has one of these honorary “Kings Daughters” as an ancestor. A person who did extensive research on our French ancestry has traced 11 Kings Daughters in our ancestry.

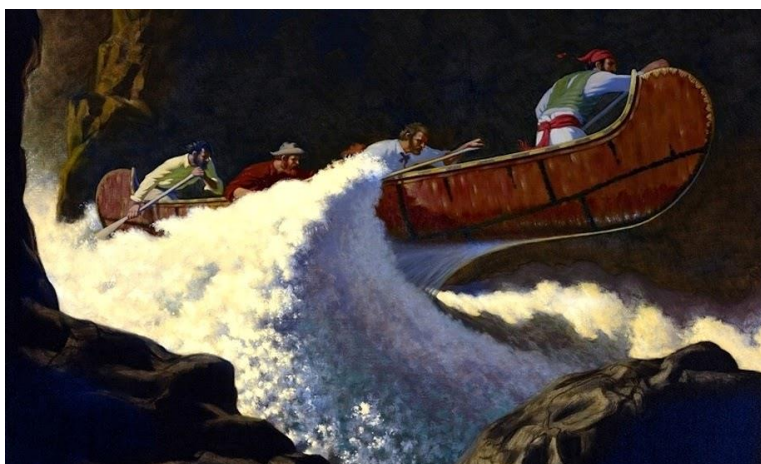


Voyagers and Fur Traders in Canada

There are remarkable 300 year old records retained of contracts between merchants and voyageurs. Your ancestors lived near

Lachine, which is now part of Montreal.

Lachine was the primary trading port on the St Lawrence River between 1700-1850. Most men were farmers, but they could make good money by contracting to be a voyageur. Contracts would be made early in the year, and men would launch in May when ice was off the rivers and return in late summer or in the case below with Rene, it was a 1 year contract. They would paddle, sometimes



with a crew of men in a huge canoe, sometimes over 600 miles against current, and portaging many times along the way. They would make the same journey to get back to Montreal loaded with pelts.

René L'Écuyer

Birth 2 OCT 1685 | Death 4 JAN 1750 • Montréal, Quebec, Canada

Your 9th great-grandfather

How connected? Grandma Mae's grandmother was Matilda Lecuyer who is buried in Aurora, IL

Rene's Story as a Voyageur: Here's the actual translation of a contract for the May 1719 Engagement of Lecuyer to Mr. Guillet: "*In the presence of Rene Lecuyer, resident of Sault-St-Louis, who voluntarily contracts himself to Mr. Paul Guillet, a merchant of this town, in order to make one round trip into the territories with a boat charged with goods and to bring back a boat heavy with pelts, when next we meet one year from now. In return Mr. Guillet is promised a profit without damages and to make honest and licit trades according to Ordinances. Mr. Guillet promises to provide goods and provisions and all expenses that are customary for the voyage. Upon return to the village with 3000 quality beaver pelts, he will pay 30 Livres and be released from his contract.*"

30 livres could possibly be worth \$7000 in today's money. He likely had a crew of men with him, as these canoes were huge, and 3000 beaver pelts was a big load.

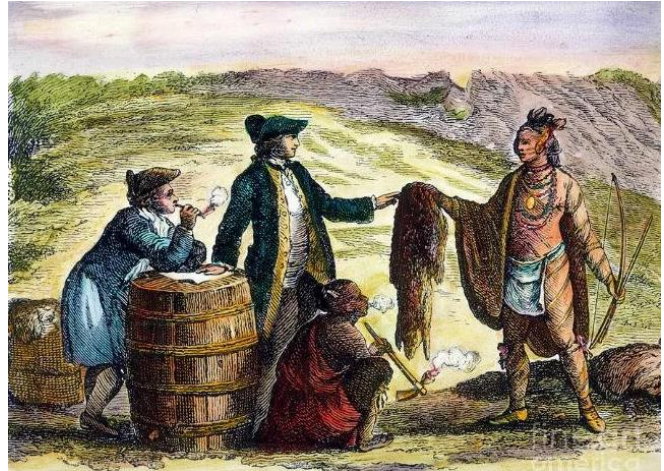
Jean Antoine Nicolas Roussel

Birth 13 FEB 1704 • Death 22 NOV 1781 • Lachine, Montréal, Québec, Canada

He was your 7th great-grandfather

How connected? Grandma Mae's father was a Rousselle – the spelling has been changed a lot over the years.

Jean's Story as a Voyageur: When he was 34, Jean lived in Lachine, which was the primary trading port in Montreal on the St Lawrence River. His first wife had died, and he had no children yet. He was a farmer like most men living in the area. I found a contract record for Jean that shows in June of 1737 he was contracted as a voyageur for Marin Hurtubise to paddle in a large canoe over 600 miles to Fort Michilimakinac, (now Mackinac Island, MI). He would have carried trade good there and after a summer of trading with Native Americans for beaver pelts and other furs, he would pack it all in the huge canoe and paddle back 600 miles and upon successful delivery to the contractor Hurtubise, he would be paid 200 pounds. He likely had a crew of men with him, as these canoes were huge.



The Pioneers of New Acadia (Nova Scotia)

Michel Boudreau (Boudrot)

Birth 1600 • Cougnes, Larochele, France | Death 1688 • Annapolis, Port Royal, Nova Scotia, Canada

Your 9th great-grandfather

How connected? Grandma Mae's grandparents were Pierre and Matilda Lecuyer who are buried in Aurora, IL. Pierre is Michel's 3rd Great Grandson.

Michel Boudrot, the founder of one of the largest Acadian families, was born about 1600 in France. In 1639, Michel was a managing agent in Port Royal, Acadia, and although the census of 1671 shows him to be a farmer, he assumed the duties of a magistrate, and the census of 1686 shows him to be the lieutenant general of the colony.



***Le Grand Dérangement* | The Great Upheaval of the Acadians & the Mother of Cajuns**

Marguerite Leblanc | Birth 1706 • Grand Pré, Nova Scotia | Death 18 APR 1782 • Saint Gabriel, Iberville Parish, Louisiana

Jean Pierre Cloutre | Birth 1695 • Grenoble, France | Died before 1763 • Port Tobacco, Charles, Maryland

This is the amazing story of your 8th Great-Grand Parents Jean Pierre Cloutre and Marguerite Leblanc who had 12 children and who all endured being ripped from their homes and turned into prisoners and refugees.

Have you ever enjoyed some Cajun food or music and pondered the background of these people that live in Louisiana? The name “Cajun” is a derivative of “Acadian” and your ancestors include the Leblanc family, considered one of the largest Acadian families. It is a long and twisting road that brought your Leblanc ancestors along with many other Acadians to Louisiana.

It all begins with [Daniel LeBlanc](#) and his wife Françoise Gaudet. He likely immigrated from France on a 3-year work contract in 1645 and made a great life in Acadia (now Nova Scotia). There is [a monument to them at their homestead location in Nova Scotia](#). In this section we focus on

Marguerite Leblanc, their great-granddaughter, who lived through many perils and upheavals and ended up founding a new family and culture in Louisiana, the Cajuns!

In Spring 1755 Marguerite (49 years) and Pierre (60 years) were comfortable and prosperous in their beloved homeland in Minas, Acadia, where they lived in great harmony with their neighbors and their children. The Acadians fostered a relationship of respect and tolerance with the native Mi'kmaq (Micmac) Indians and they lived peacefully with each other. Pierre was a gunsmith and they had 12 children, with the youngest being 5 years old and the oldest 35.



The Acadians fostered a relationship of respect and tolerance with the native Mi'kmaq (Micmac) Indians.

This happy life they lived was about to end. Read on to learn about the hardships they were to endure before the end of 1755.

In the Fall of 1755, *The Great Upheaval* or *The Great Derangement*, also known as *Le Grand Dérangement*, was the forced removal of the Acadians, the French inhabitants of what is now called Nova Scotia, from their homes and property during the French and Indian War. It is said the Acadians were deported because they refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the British crown who now owned the land. But the bigger motive is that the British really wanted this rich farmland for their own settlers.

So, on September 5, 1755, British Colonel Winslow ordered the Acadian men to gather at the church in Grand-Pré to receive a message. When they arrived the men were locked inside the church and read the decree which stated that the Acadians' land, livestock, and other effects were forfeited to the Crown, and they were to be removed from the province.

Marguerite and Pierre's older son Dominique (23) was one of those imprisoned along with hundreds of other Acadian men at the church in Grand-Pré. On a list of prisoners, he was said to own 2 bullocks, 3 cows, 8 young cattle, 18 sheep, 8 hogs, and 1 horse. His property and livestock were forfeited to the crown, and his family was required to prepare for deportation within 30 days. He was married and had 2 very young children. In December 1755, Dominique, Françoise and their children were deported to Massachusetts.



In the ensuing weeks, throughout Acadia, British soldiers rounded up terrified civilians including Marguerite and Pierre, burning their homes and crops and loaded them on ships. Over 10,000 Acadians were torn from their homeland and their families with families deliberately split apart and shipped to various British colonies in America.

Because none of the colonies wanted the Acadians, many of the ships held them captive on the ships in the various ports that winter. They slept, cooked and ate in the dark, dank holds of the ship for three to six months and they began to die from starvation, the horrific spread of disease, and terrible sanitation conditions.

Exiled to Maryland

In November of 1755, four ships carrying over 900 Acadian exiles arrived in Port Tobacco, Maryland and were left to fend for themselves. **Marguerite and Pierre** were on one of these ships. Port Tobacco, Maryland on the Potomac River was a busy port and the second largest place in Maryland. The port was accessed from the Atlantic Ocean through Chesapeake Bay. Years later silt closed up access to Port Tobacco and today it is the state's smallest incorporated community, with barely a dozen residents.

The refugees were quartered as prisoners, "not to leave town without a written permit of the selectmen under penalty of five days in prison or ten lashes". They depended on the reluctant public for food clothes and lodging and were given some provisions. They found work on farms as indentured servants, toiling along slaves in the fields harvesting tobacco. For over a dozen years, they endured life among British colonists who did not care much for the Catholic French Acadians

thrust upon them. The death toll in Maryland was heavy and by the time of the census of 1763, the population shrank from 913 to 667 people.

Pierre died in Port Tobacco sometime between his arrival in 1755 and 1763 because in July 1763 Marguerite is listed as a widow. St. Ignatius Church, the oldest continuously operating Catholic parish in the United States, is located in Port Tobacco has records for its cemetery that include the name Cloatre, so perhaps he was buried there.

Free To Begin a New Life

After 8 years, after the Treaty of Paris, Acadians were allowed to leave the colonies where they had been virtual prisoners. Approximately 3,600 Acadians left to return to live in Quebec (Marguerite's son Dominique, your 7th Great-Grandfather did that). Another 4,500 chose to leave for Louisiana which was then under the control of a Catholic Spain.

When word reached the Acadians in Maryland that fellow exiles had been welcomed in Louisiana, they pooled their meager resources to charter ships that would take them to New Orleans. The remaining Cloutre family, the widowed Marguerite, her sons Louis, Pierre-Sylvain, and Joseph, and daughters Anne and Marthe-Marie departed for New Orleans on the ship "*The Jane*", which left Port Tobacco on Dec. 17, 1767, and arrived safely two months later. Marguerite endured the death of her husband and one of her sons and being separated from other family. She was to begin a new life.



The Arrival of the Acadians in Louisiana mural by Robert Dafford at the Acadian Memorial, St. Martinville, Louisiana

A New Life In Louisiana – The Beginnings of the Cajuns

The Spaniards gave them land, farming tools, guns and enough provisions to sustain life until their first harvest. They were first forced to settle where they had not wanted to go at Fort San Luis de Natchez on the river far above Baton Rouge, but were able to leave in 1769 to settle where they wanted. They moved downriver to the Acadian Coast communities of San Gabriel or St.-Jacques in Iberville where the family grew and thrived.

The [Acadian Memorial](#) in St. Martinville, Louisiana contains a large wall with a plaque listing the names and family members of approximately 3,000 Acadian refugees who came to Louisiana. It allows people to find family names and rub an impression of a great ancestor on a piece of paper. So, perhaps if you visit there you can make a rubbing of Marguerite LeBlanc's name on Plaque 2R. With her are listed her children: Pierre, Anne, Marthe, and Joseph. Learn more about the family [here](#) at [arcadiansingrey.com](#).

Your Connection: You are connected through Marguerite's son Dominique who had been separated from his family in The Great Derangement in 1755 and sent to Boston with his family. After the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, the Acadians detained in the American colonies were finally free to leave. In March 1765, the Governor of Quebec, issued a proclamation offering free land to new immigrants.

From Quebec to a new country and life in Aurora, IL

Dominique was on a list, dated June 2, 1766, in Boston, of French Neutrals wishing to emigrate to Quebec. I don't blame them for wanting to leave, things were really heating up in the colonies at that time! In 1767, Dominique and Françoise, who was very pregnant, and their 6 children boarded a schooner that left Boston in June and docked at the port of Québec on July 23, 1767. Just 3 weeks later, Françoise gave birth to their son Dominique in their new country! The family of 9 settled at La Prairie, near Montreal.

Now were' going to fast forward about 80 years, to around 1845, Dominique and Françoise's great-granddaughter Marie

(your 4th Great-Grandmother) who was 23 years old and her

husband Pierre Lecure (LeCuyer) migrated to America to Aurora, IL where there were jobs building the new railroad and land was plentiful. Many people of French heritage had already settled in Aurora. Pierre found work with the Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy Railroad at the Roundhouse and Locomotive Shop. It is now a famous historic building converted into a restaurant and brewery (Two Brothers Brewery and Roundhouse) in Aurora (I've been there several times and didn't know the connection!) Marie and Pierre are both buried in Aurora and their great-granddaughter was Mae Rousselle Serns Bellard, your great-grandmother! Mae was born in Aurora.



I've sat next to these old fireplaces at the Roundhouse Brewery in Aurora several times, not knowing my connection with this historic place.



Founders of a New Church: The First Norwegian Seventh-day Adventist Church in America

Ole and Ingrid Serns - Your 4th Great Grandparents.

Your Connection: Ole and Ingrid's great-grandson Cyle Serns married Mae Rousselle and their children were Mary Ann (your grandmother) and Cyle Serns.

Ole and Ingrid Serns were married in Ovrebo Church in Øvrebø, Norway in 1827. They had 11 children in 22 years and owned their own farm. Ole and three other village men had their spiritual interests stirred by meetings in their homes with Quakers and other lay preachers, where they had come to feel that some of the doctrines of the Lutheran state church were not in harmony with the Scriptures. They felt strongly that the keeping of the Holy Day should be observed on Saturday (the 7th Day), not on Sunday. These beliefs had caused them to be ridiculed. However, news about opportunities for religious freedom and improved economic conditions in America arrived at their village and after much discussion, the men decided to leave Norway for America.



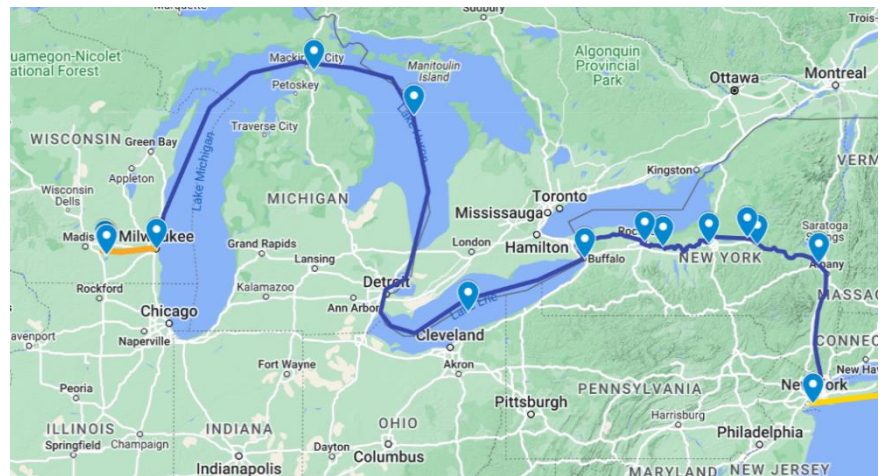
Ole and Ingrid Serns were married in Ovrebo Church in Øvrebø, Norway in 1827.

A Three Month, 5600 mile Journey To The New World

The Norwegian emigrant guidebooks recommended an early start in spring so that crops could be raised for food the first year and the emigrants would have time to build a house and prepare for winter.

So, on April 23, 1850, Ole Serns, Andrew Olsen, and Holver Olsen and their families departed from the port city of Kristiansand, Norway and had an

8-week journey crossing the Atlantic in the sailing ship *Hermes*, arriving May 26 in New York. Then it would take another four weeks to make the 1300-mile journey from New York City to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They traveled first by steamboat up the winding Hudson River and then by way of the Erie Canal to Buffalo. On the Erie Canal they traveled 339 miles on packet boats, which were large wooden boats that looked like a box. These packet boats were pulled by horses that walked along

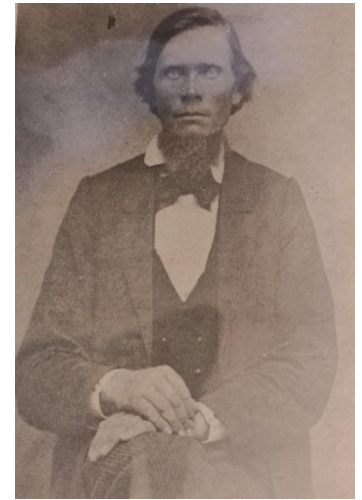


Their 1300-mile route from New York to Koshkonong, WI.

Click on [link](#) to view their entire journey in detail.

the edge of the canal traveling 2 mph and cost passengers between two to four cents per mile, so that trip cost them \$6-13 per person.

From Buffalo the families went by lake steamer from Lake Erie, Lake Huron, the Mackinac Straits, and Lake Michigan. At Milwaukee they were met by a Norwegian named Peter Larson, who transported the families by bullock cart the seventy miles to his home in southern Oakland township in Jefferson County, which was part of the Norwegian settlement of Koshkonong, Wisconsin. Since the Olsen and Serns families went directly to Koshkonong, prior arrangements must have been made. The Koshkonong settlement was well-known in Norway where they called it “Koskeland” and many had already settled in that area. In 1850 the Koshkonong area had 2,670 Norwegians. This was only 18 years since Chief Blackhawk and his people were chased by the US Militia (1832) through the exact land where they settled, and the US Government was still removing the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. Lake Koshkonong had many old Ho-Chunk villages around its 40-mile banks.



Ole Serns lived 51 years.
1806-1857

Settling In Wisconsin

The entire journey from Norway to Koshkonong took the Olsen and Serns families about 13 weeks and they likely arrived at the end of June. The men got to work choosing good land and on July 11, 1850 Ole Serns purchased eighty acres for one hundred dollars (.80 an acre!) and built a cabin for his family. Ingrid gave birth only 1 month later to her last child.



Ingrid Serns lived 88
years. 1809-1897

The families soon became members of the Willerup Methodist Church in Cambridge, which is the first Scandinavian Methodist church in the world. There they still worshipped on Sunday, but it was there they found the difference between a living faith and the dead formalism back home in Norway. The Serns farm was 5 miles from Willerup’s church, and Pastor Willerup reported that “many people walked to church five or six miles, even in stormy weather to hear the word of God”. But the families still studied and discussed keeping the 7th day Holy.

Unfortunately, Ole did not live long in the new world as he was killed in 1857 in a lumbering accident and was buried with a wooden cross that is long gone in an unmarked grave at Willerup Methodist Church in Cambridge. But Ingrid, and most of his family joined the other men in forming **Seventh-day Adventist Church** in Oakland, near Lake Koshkonong. This church is the oldest Scandinavian Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States. Now called the Oakland Seventh Day Adventist Church, you can still visit today and see the graves of your Norwegian ancestors. Under a small shrub beside the grave of Inger and her daughter there is a small slab of rock without any inscription. Some think it is Ole Serns’ memorial stone. There are detailed papers that have been written about their journey from Norway to America for their beliefs, including a 512-page graduate student dissertation.



Benjamin Serns' Story

Ole and Ingrid's grandson Benjamin soon followed his grandparents to America, although his parents Silje Bertine and Aanen stayed in Norway, and it is through his parents that we still have relatives in Norway. Silje was renowned in Norway as a master weaver, and I wonder if she was the maker of the beautiful wool throw that is featured on the back cover of this booklet.

Benjamin was a good carpenter who built many houses and buildings in south central Wisconsin. When his uncle Andrew Serns had his leg cut off in a horse-drawn mower accident, Ben carved a wooden peg-leg for him. He played violin in an orchestra in Chicago, IL and while there he met Bertha Pope and married her. They moved to Cambridge, Wisconsin where he was a violist and carpenter/cabinet maker.

Bertha succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving behind 4 young children, our ancestor Clyle (5), Floyd (6), Bernice (2) and 1-year-old Serns. Benjamin died when he was 90 years old and is buried at East Lawn Cemetery in Leeson Park in Beloit with his brother Serns Serns. Benjamin's son Clyle Serns married Mae Rousselle and their children were Mary Ann (your grandmother) and Clyle Serns. Cindy has a small cabinet that his brother Serns made for Mary Ann.

Tin Can Tourist Benjamin

I remember my mom Mary Ann talking about her grandpa Benjamin Serns who used to take an Airstream trailer to Sarasota, Florida each year for the winter with his 2nd wife Ella. He likely was one of the so called "Tin Can Tourist", a large contingent of people that made the trek to Florida to camp for the winter. Mom would say "Sarasota" with a Norwegian accent, because that's how her grandpa used to say it.

I asked my Dad (Bob) about it and he remembered a story about how they would try to stay overnight at a gas station, to use their bathroom and ask them for hot water. Uncle Clyle remembered that the gas stations would sometimes ask for \$1, and if so, they would keep going down the road. He remembers it being about 1949 when Benjamin would do these trips. He would buy a new Airstream trailer and haul it down there and buy a lot to keep it on. Every year or two, he'd buy a new Airstream to haul down there and remembers that Ella would have to tell him if the stoplight was green or red due to failing eyesight. Clyle said Benjamin got sick down there and his sons Floyd and Clyle rented an ambulance, drove down to get him and bring him back. He died in 1956.

Uncle Clyle remembers also that Benjamin had tremors in his hand later in life and he would insist on putting his own sugar in his coffee and by the time the spoon reached the cup, it was almost empty.



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Our Brave Grandmothers

Mae Bertille Rousselle Serns Bellard

Born May 3 1909 in Aurora, Illinois | Died Aug 10, 1996 Beloit, WI

Mae's maternal grandparents were Anthony Gosselin and Matilda Lecuyer, this is where the Gosselin and Lecuyer ancestral line you've read about comes from. Her paternal grandparents were John (who fought in the Civil War) and Eleanor Rousselle, where the Rousselle ancestors came from in earlier stories in this booklet. Both sets had immigrated to Aurora, IL.

Mae's Story: Three months after Mae was born her mother Annie died from complications from childbirth. Mae had a sister Loretta that was 5 years old at the time. Her father John had been a Private with the Illinois Infantry, serving during the Spanish American War in the Philippine Islands. While serving he contracted Malaria, and the lingering effects of that illness plagued him his whole life. He was often unemployed and could not care for his daughters, so he sent Loretta to be with Annie's sisters in Kansas who were Catholic nuns running an orphanage. Mae was shuttled from family member to family member until her teens.

John and his brother Charles had married two sisters, Annie and Florence. Mae lived until she was 2 ½ with Josie, his sister Lucy's daughter (Josie's patchwork crazy quilt is on the cover of this book). Later she lived with Florence and Charles, and she remembers hiding the fact that she had holes in her shoes, as they didn't have much money, and she didn't want to bother them. She was loved by those aunts and uncles, but she always felt she didn't belong to anybody. Her Uncle John Gosline (he's the one you learned about earlier who founded Beloit Foundry with Jackie Oldenburg's grandfather, then founded Taylor Freezer and Beloit Boat Club) thought Mae looked like his sister Annie and used to bring her from Aurora to Beloit to stay with his family during the summer.

When she was 9 years old, Mae came home from school and saw a trunk on the porch of her aunt and uncle's home. She snuck upstairs and saw an older girl sleeping on the bed and just knew it was her sister Loretta, back from the orphanage. She sat next to her and held on to one of her hair braids and thought "*Now I've got someone who belongs to me!*"

After that her dad found work and rented a house in Beloit on 6th St. Later John married Ida, a woman with 2 girls and moved with Mae to Ida's home in Edgerton. One daughter, Mary, didn't like Mae being there and she once locked Mae up in a chicken coop from 8:00am to 3:00pm when her dad got home from work. Her dad held her and said "*Pet, Pet, what are we going to do?*" One day Mary took a hot poker from the cook stove and put in down her back, burning Mae. Poor Mae!



Josie, little Mae and Aunt Florence.

Mae moved back to Beloit to live with her now married sister Loretta. She eventually got a job at Fairbanks counting parts. She met a handsome taxi driver named Clyde Serns at a dance hall in downtown Beloit. She recommended him for a job at Fairbanks, where he worked his way up from a machinist to foreman and worked there the rest of his life. They married and had Mary Ann and Clyde Jr., but it was always her fear that she would die and leave her children without a mother, like her. She wrote that she fought so hard to send them to a Catholic school and go to church. Her husband wouldn't go to church, and lots of times she'd return from church and he would have the house in a shambles because he resented the fact that her religion meant so much to her. Before Clyde died he did get baptized, answering Mae and their children's prayers that he would come to know God in the special way that they did. Mae wrote a brief life story in 1993 where I've taken some of these facts.



Clyde and Mae on their wedding day in 1931.

When she was young Mae said her schoolmates called her "Frenchy" because of her French heritage. You have been introduced to her many amazing French ancestors and I think Mae would be so proud to learn of their heroic lives. **I think Mae also lived a heroic life!**

Rose (Růžena) Votava Psajdl

Birth June 29, 1895 • Susice, Czechoslovakia | **Death** Aug 14, 1974 • Beloit, Wisconsin

Your Connection: Rose was the mother of Bob Seidel

Rose's story: Due to the loss of so many records during the world wars in Europe, we don't have a lot of details about Rose's early life in the small town of Susice in Bohemia, Czechoslovakia. The population was about 300 people when she was born to Mathias (Matej) and Katherina Votava in 1895. But, we do know that when she was 17 she boarded a ship in Bremen, Germany and arrived in New York on Christmas Eve in 1912. Oral history tells us that her father felt she was the smartest of his children and thought she would have a better life in America. She wasn't alone on the ship, as a friend from her village, Rose Psajdl, came on the journey as well.



St. Wenceslas Church in Susice where Rose was likely baptized.

Rose made her way to Chicago among the Czech community where she connected with her friend Rose Psajdl's brother, a handsome musician named Emil Psajdl. She married him about 2 years after her arrival. They had 2 children, Rose and Emil, while living in the Chicago area. And then Emil, a clarinet player, found a job in Beloit with Fairbanks Morse Co., who recruited him to come work for them and play in their company band. In Beloit they settled in a cute home on Church Street and had 4 more sons. Frank, Harold, Charles, Robert and a daughter Betty. She loved to garden, and I remember the Czech breads and meals that she made. We still honor Rose by baking bread and making huge dumplings with paprika onion gravy with her recipes on Christmas. Some of her

flowers from her garden made their way into her son Bob's garden and then made their way into mine. I like to think a piece of Rose lives on in her heirloom flowers in my yard.

Brave Rose's Legacy

I think of how brave Rose must have been to leave her family at 17 years for a 2-month, 7000-mile journey from her family to a new life in America. I have her tattered baptism certificate, barely held together with cellophane tape. She must have clutched that certificate securely when she disembarked from her ship in America, it was her only identity and connection with her old life. How did she feel at that moment, was she excited or scared?

And how brave she had to be when her 4 oldest sons went off to various parts of the world during World War II. She was heartbroken and never recovered from the death of her son Charles in the South Pacific and sadly struggled with mental health issues the rest of her life.

But, I like to remember Rose for the brave choice that she made to leave her homeland to forge a new life in America, forever impacting and influencing her future family's lives.



Rose holding a bouquet of flowers in her flower-filled garden on Church St.



I hope you've enjoyed learning about some of the heroes of your family. I've enjoyed finding out their stories and sharing them with you!

Therese Seidel Oldenburg - December 2024

On the back cover is a brightly dyed wool throw made by one of your Norwegian ancestors, likely in Norway. I feel it represents the threads of all the ancestors in this booklet woven together to make your colorful family story.



*The Woven Threads
of Your Ancestry*