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The earliest ancestors of the Pelkey and Seymour families originally had the names of Pelletier and

Couture. They came from France in the early 1600s through a land grant brought about by Cardinal Richelieu, who had become the most powerful person in France. He was both the head of the Church in France and Prime Minister of the government, having control of almost every facet of French politics, from the daily activities of the court to foreign policy and affairs.

In 1627, Richelieu granted a charter to the "Company of One Hundred Associates." It was under this charter that the company was granted full title to land in the New France. The French devised a scheme of "Land Grants" to persons of means. For gentlemen of France who had served their country well, grants of land were made in New France. With these land grants came certain obligations. The system known as the "Seigneurial System" obligated the "Seigneur" to bring settlers out of France to New France. The colonists were given passage to New France along with a stipend by contract that warranted a portion of the land to farm on his own for providing services to the Lord or Seigneur. The services were helping the Seigneur develop his land and build churches and government buildings. This was the beginning of New France. The territory of New France extended from Hudson Bay to the mouth of the Mississippi (including Louisiana) and included Newfoundland and all the land from Labrador to Maine.

According to the research of friends, George and Joyce Martin and subsequent reading on my part of the history of these settlers by Bona Arsenault, both my maternal and paternal ancestors were among those recorded in the passenger log of the ship bringing the original settlers to the new French colony.

The Pelletiers (later changed to Pelkey) and the Coutures (later changed to Seymour) were among those who came to Canada while others went to Acadia.

The British had staked their claim along the east coast where the 13 colonies of what would become the U.S. lay. Acadia was part of Canada yet is often regarded as separate because it had a much shorter history as part of French-occupied territory. It was one of the first areas conquered by the British in 1713. The British named their new possession north of New England "the province of Quebec."

While some of the settlers were involved in the fur trade, others had established agricultural roots and were eventually able to build a satisfying lifestyle in their new land. A peaceful people, caught between warring factions, the French Canadians managed to remain neutral for many years, but eventually were ordered to fight in the French and Indian War in the early 18th century.

When they refused, a violent and devastating persecution was mounted against them by the British. Homes were attacked and destroyed, families were torn apart, crops were burned and while some escaped, many were captured and put on ships some of which were not seaworthy and many were lost at sea. Others reached New Orleans and their descendants are known as Cajuns.

Among those who escaped were five Pelletier brothers, some of whom came down into New York State, changing their name to Pelkey, apparently with the hope that they would escape being identified as French.



My mother's father left Canada as a young man when his family chose him as the son to enter the priesthood (which was supposedly a custom of the French families at that time.) He came to Schenectady, New York and changed his name to Seymour and found employment with the American Locomotive Company. There he met and married my grandmother, Louisa Benoit. When I was still rather young, I recall my parents telling my brother and myself that there was a time when those of French Canadian ancestry were called "Canucks," a pejorative name signifying we were descendants of French Canadians and therefore we were considered foreigners! Even in the first half of the 20th Century, the roots of prejudice apparently still ran deep. However, I don't recall ever being personally subjected to any prejudice because of my ancestry.

Reading of the terrible persecution of the French people made me realize that my ancestors were peaceful people who apparently only wished to provide for themselves and their families and yet suffered at the hands of others. I also realize that the persecuted often become the persecutors in another generation or two! Sadly, too many people today, themselves descendants of immigrants, perpetuate persecution of those who come to our country to experience the same freedoms we now take for granted.

In learning of the conditions of the people in France in the mid 1600s, with disease and starvation being rampant, it has always been a source of gratitude to me that my ancestors emigrated from France at that time. It was in the same century that the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a community of women religious, was founded "to meet the needs of the times" and of which I became a member 300 years later!

