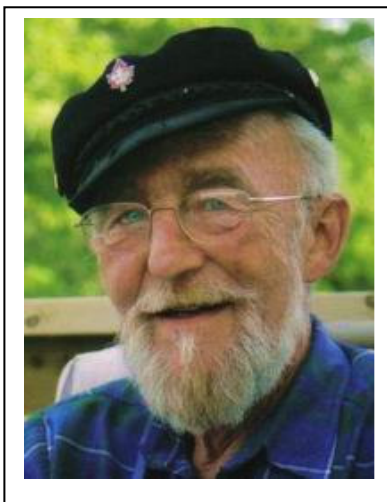


The Disappearing Man



A reader contacted me recently with an intriguing problem. He knew the date and place (1829, Beauce, Quebec) of arrival of his immigrant ancestor but from then until 1855 when he showed up on Calumet Island is a completely blank page. He would naturally like to fill in that fairly sizeable gap and was wondering where to start.

The first three things that I would suggest to check and not necessarily in any particular order would be:

1. The censuses for the blank period. In this case, the 1851 Census for Quebec was a nominal census so all members of the household would be listed. If the immigrant can't be found in the area where he first settled, maybe he had moved earlier than expected. Library and Archives Canada has the microfilms for this census. The Pontiac Archives in Shawville may have a copy of their census.
2. If someone spent about twenty-six years in an area, it is likely that there would be records in their church of baptisms, marriages or burials. The Church records for Ste-Marie-de-Beauce go back to 1745. These church records are available through the Family History Library in Salt Lake City (www.familysearch.org) or at the Archives Nationales du Quebec at Montreal. The records for this case are on Drouin reels 751 (1821-1842) and 752 (1842-1875).
3. Someone arriving in this period may have received a Crown Grant of land. Library and Archives Canada has the 'Petitions for Crown Grants' on microfilm and they contain most information of genealogical value. The Quebec Family History Society could do a lookup of an actual grant in Quebec for a few dollars (www.cam.org/~qfhs/index.html). The land transfer records would be the responsibility the County Land Registry Offices in Ontario or the local Judicial District in Quebec. It would certainly be interesting to know when he sold his land there. Contact information for Quebec's 36 Judicial Districts is available on their website: <http://www.justice.gouv.qc.ca/>.

Where are They?

Another case came up where a family in England did not appear on either the 1891 or the 1901 census. The researcher had evidence in the form of birth certificates that they were there during that period and he wondered if there could be a logical explanation why they were overlooked in both of those censuses, even though they were on earlier ones.

I replied that I was not sure that the reason for the omissions is necessarily the same in both cases but it does look as though he was not in the country at those times. I would be inclined to check for military service or working for a British contractor overseas, perhaps in South Africa. There were a lot of British engineering projects throughout the Empire at that time.

It is also possible that he was working on a merchant vessel, especially one that was not under British registry.

Of course, it is also possible that they were just not at home when the enumerator called on either occasion. Another possibility is that either the enumerators or transcribers got the name wrong. Misspellings are by no means rare and these would be the easiest to check out. Other than being in a hospital, jail, or lunatic asylum, I think this covers the possibilities that I can think of.

As a postscript, the reader got back to me and told me that there was a family story that the father of the family had been a seaman, so we might have the answer.