

WERE THERE EARLIER FRENCH SETTLERS IN CLINTON COUNTY?

PART 3

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This is the third and concluding article in this series on possible early French settlers in Clinton County.

The January 23-29, 2008 issue of the *Lake Champlain Weekly* looked at the historic record for the earliest European settlers in Clinton County. The pertinent question was:

Which European built the first permanent residential structure in what was to become our present Clinton County?

It was found that the earliest in order were Gilliland in 1766; LaFramboise in 1768, De Fredenburg in 1770; and Hay in 1772.

Since the article appeared there were three letters to the editor of the *LCW* which questioned what was presented. This series attempted to address those concerns and comments.

Part 1 of this series discussed the sources used by Thomas Pray in his letter of February 6th, 2008. The conclusion was: settlement at or near the mouth of the Chazy River prior to 1768 was based upon incorrect interpretation of Kalm's record of his 1749 Lake Champlain voyage by our earliest historian Palmer, and later by Coolidge, Bellico and others.

Part 2 examined Pray's letter of February 20, 2008 of a possible new source of information indicating a saw mill may have been built at the mouth of the Chazy by Jean Chartier in the 1746 time frame. It was proposed that more research was needed to substantiate this claim.

Part 3 responds to a letter by David Kendall Martin in which he claimed critical data may have been missed supporting an earlier date of 1763 for Jean LaFramboise having settled in Chazy, rather than the 1768 date claimed in my earlier article. It also responds to comments attributed to Clinton County Historian Anastasia Pratt in the January 10th, 2009 edition of the *Free Trader TODAY*.

MISSED EVIDENCE ON LaFRAMBOISE?

Mr. Martin is a renowned local historian and author. I have admired his work over the years and am pleased he took the time to review and comment on my article in his letter of February 20, 2008.

He wrote:

A piece of evidence not mentioned by him [meaning this writer] is found in A History of the Town of Chazy beginning on page 18.

What he did not say is that he, along with Nell Sullivan, is the author of the wonderful book he quotes. His book was indeed used as a source in writing my article and I am fully aware of what he wrote starting at page 18 and earlier.

In his letter he wrote about legal suits concerning ownership of lands:

In 1814 it was stated in the evidence that Jean La Framboise had settled in what is now Chazy in 1763...He evidently was there to establish his site on the two lots of land granted to him...

Does Mr. Martin's own book say that? Mr. Martin described an 1809 action of ejection by Winthrop against Ingraham on the lands in question. About that action Mr. Martin wrote:

The defendant Ingraham produced a certificate of survey, made the 21st of February 1766 by one P.J. Labrosse, one of the royal surveyors of Canada..., at the request of Francis Mackay [The owner of the La Gauchetiere seignory as of 1760, where LaFramboise later settled] in which he stated that he had

surveyed the manor, accompanied by Mackay, and ran the lines which he described.

It appears the earliest the seignory was surveyed and separate lots laid out may have been the warm season of 1765. If lots were not laid out until 1765 then how could LaFramboise "...establish his site on the two lots of land granted to him" as early as 1763? It could be, however, that the 1766 document was certifying an earlier survey of unknown date.

Later in the same paragraph, Mr. Martin continued:

Several witnesses, whose names we do not have, were further produced on the part of the defendant to testify that they went into possession of parcels of land within the seignory by permission of Mackay in 1763 and 1764 and continued in possession until the American war, when they left...

No substantiation of this statement or quoted court records were produced or referenced by Mr. Martin. Witnesses were testifying about events of forty-six years earlier. No other accounts describe any other settlers in the area other than LaFramboise. This is the first time such a claim appears in the historic record.

Palmer's book of 1853 noted LaFramboise visited Chazy in 1763 but did not stay long; returned to Canada; and returned to settle in

Chazy in 1768. By March of 1763 the Chazy area had become part of New York Province so the statement of his returning to Canada meant LaFramboise was returning north to the Province of Canada. More importantly it was written as Palmer would have perceived the move in 1853, not as LaFramboise did.

Palmer went on to write that De Fredenburg settled on the Saranac River: *After LaFramboise's first visit, but before his actual location in 1768...* thus confirming, in Palmer's view, that LaFramboise had not settled in Chazy prior to 1768.

Palmer noted the next settler after LaFramboise was Joseph la Monte or Monty; but not until 1774. If there are claimed earlier settlers in 1763 or 1764 no other record of them exists. Witness's names are missing and no reference is made to LaFramboise by the witnesses. This should not be considered a primary or even secondary source, and may be hearsay evidence at best.

In later court actions of 1815 and 1822 as minutely detailed by Mr. Martin, the earliest written record of a grant of land from Mackay to LaFramboise is a title or "billet de concession" dated June 28, 1768 in which:

Laframboise has permission to take two lots of land in my seignory on Lake Champlain to settle himself there...

It is signed by Francis Mackay, the accepted owner of the property at the time. It would be most helpful to know the source and location of these quoted 1809, 1815, and 1822 court records. A search for the originals in his bibliography and elsewhere has not yet been successful.

No other earlier documentation is produced in Mr. Martin's quite thorough analysis of these actions to prove any settlement earlier than 1768. His book turns a visit in 1763 into settlement that year rather than in 1768 as Palmer stated.

If Mr. Martin has in his possession or knows of the location of earlier documentation, or witness statements, or court papers, it would be most important to place them in the public record where historians could consider them.

DOES SUFFICIENT HISTORIC DATA EXIST PRIOR TO 1788?

Anastasia Pratt, our new Clinton County Historian, was quoted in the January 10th edition of the *Free Trader TODAY* newspaper in an article by Jeremiah Papineau. I welcome Anastasia Pratt to her new position as County Historian and wish her a long tenure and much success.

She was quoted as saying:

- Because Clinton County was formed in 1788 *untangling the web of land ownership and residence before that date is virtually impossible.*
- *LaFramboise is generally accepted as the first permanent, white settler...because official land records do exist for his settlement.*
- *The lack of material evidence hinders specific claims to the earliest permanent settlements.*
- *It is quite possible [Gilliland's] house predates...LaFramboise... However, short of new documentary evidence and the dating of the original structure, we have no real way of knowing for certain.*

Clinton County was indeed formed in 1788. However, the Clinton County Clerk's Office contains deeds dating back to 1784; from 1772 to 1788 we were part of Washington County; and prior to 1772 we were part of Albany County. Land records for this area dating back to 1765 are available in the records of those counties and the State archives. Early deeds for Gilliland, LaFramboise, and De Fredenburg do exist for the dates given for settlement.

Court records, journals, letters, diaries, books, histories and many other documents exist for the years prior to the founding of our County which give an extensive insight into early settlement. For instance, Sir William Johnson's letters and daily journal tell of the

early visits of De Fredenburg and Gilliland looking for settlement advice, establishing that at the time of their visits they had not yet discovered the Champlain Valley let alone settled there. Gilliland's *Journal* or diary told the story of his building his house in 1766 giving substantial proof of his settlement prior to LaFramboise in 1768, and provided actual land survey data which established the exact location of the house.

My article of January 2008, which possibly pre-dates Anastasia Pratt's arrival as our County Historian, offers extensive documentation of these items and we refer her to that article. There is more primary source evidence in the local record of Gilliland's 1766 settlement than there is of LaFramboise' in 1768.

ORIGINAL PREMISE

Again, the first sentence of the original article asked which European built the first permanent residential structure in what was to become our present Clinton County? It was the same premise used by Palmer, our earliest local historian and by Mr. Martin in his book where he used the term "first permanent white settler" to describe his opinion of Jean LaFramboise.

Some important words are "European", "permanent", and "residential" which should be used in a consistent manner over time.

EUROPEAN means a settler with original heritage in Europe regardless of how long or how many generations they had resided in North America, and would exclude Native Americans. Gilliland, LaFramboise, De Fredenburg, and Hay would all have qualified as European.

Mr. Martin discussed the possibility of Native American settlers in our County. At this point there is no record of them. This was a war zone for centuries between the Algonquin speaking tribes to the north and east, and the Iroquois tribes to the south and west. As a result, it would be unlikely for any long term settlement to have taken place. It is left to future research by others to examine this possibility in more detail.

PERMANENT, as was previously described in Part 2, means a land holding and structure had to have been long lasting and not abandoned by the owners or builders, and the land holders had to have returned to their land after War and rebuilt. French homes at the Chazy River, if they ever existed, could have been considered long lasting having been built as early as 1743 but they were abandoned by 1759 and the builders did not return and rebuild. Their land holdings did not survive. The State of New York did not honor the French seigniori claims after the American Revolution.

The land holdings of Gilliland, LaFramboise, and Hay did survive after the Revolution and they did return after their houses were destroyed and did rebuild. De Fredenburg's also survived but he did not rebuild since his land was confiscated by the State of New York as a result of his support of the British in the Revolution.

RESIDENTIAL, also described earlier, means a structure was used for human habitation. The houses of Gilliland, LaFramboise, De Fredenburg, and Hay would have qualified.

CONCLUSIONS

EARLIEST SETTLERS

There still appears to be little provable evidence LaFramboise settled in Chazy any earlier than 1768; or there was any earlier French settlement anyplace within Clinton County prior to 1768, let alone at or near the mouth of the Chazy River.

If sufficient proof can yet be found that earlier French pioneers did indeed settle in the County prior to 1768, and where they settled they should be recognized in the historic record.

Contrary to Mr. Pray's and Mr. Martin's letters, and the comments of our County Historian, the earlier findings shall not be modified.

- Our earliest French permanent residential settler should be recognized as Jean LaFramboise in 1768 in the future Town of Chazy.
- The earliest permanent residence should be recognized as a house built by William Gilliland in 1766 and occupied by William Hay and Henry Cross on the Friswell Patent in the Town of Plattsburgh.
- Next were Charles De Fredenburg in 1770 in the City of Plattsburgh; and
- William Hay in 1772 in the Town of Peru.

OLDEST LAND TITLES

The oldest land titles found to date and recognized by the State of New York in Clinton County are the May 6, 1765 grants by the British Crown of the Friswell and Stuart Patents in the towns of Plattsburgh and Peru respectively. The originals of these grants are in the archives at the New York State Library in Albany.

The 2000 acre Friswell Patent was granted to Lieutenant John Friswell who, under previous agreement, immediately transferred it to William Gilliland August 6, 1765. The 2000 acre Stewart Patent was issued to Masters Mate Peter Stewart who, also under previous agreement, immediately transferred it to William Gilliland. The originals of these transfers are in the Local Collection at the Plattsburgh Public Library.

Next oldest is the June 28, 1768 grant to LaFramboise of lands of Mackay in the Town of Chazy, upheld by a State court in 1822.

While it is quoted in the Chazy history, it would be interesting to know the location of the original of this document.

After LaFramboise, the next oldest is the January 11, 1769 grant to Charles De Fredenburg by the British Crown of 30,000 acres beginning opposite Valcour. The original of this document may also be in the archives of the State of New York in Albany. This is the same land area eventually given by the State to Zephaniah Platt and 32 other proprietors in 1785.

William Hay's land in the future Town of Peru was a parcel of the Gilliland owned Stewart Patent.

FINAL COMMENT

These opinions are subject to the continuous search for new data and would be gladly modified if such data is found and verified. The author would be pleased to receive any questions or comments, or to continue the discussion. He can be contacted at daveglenn@charter.net.

