
THE PIONEER COUPLE

JULIEN MERCIER AND MARIE POULIN

Son of François Mercier and Roberte Cornilleau, Julien (also spelled Jullien and Jullian), eighth child of the family, was baptized on February 27th, 1621 in the church of Saint-Aubin de Tourouvre, a village located in the Mortagne district of the diocese of Chartres, in Perche, in the Orne Department, France. In 1627, at the age of 6, he was orphaned and then was raised by his brother Jean on an estate called “La Grandinière”. From that house Julien left for New France in 1647.

Two days before his 26th birthday, on February 25, 1647, Julien accepted a three-year contract, made before Maître Choiseau, notary, to come and work in New France. He was still single at the time and he worked as a farm hand; he could not even sign his own name. His contract of engagement linked him to Noël Juchereau, Sieur des Chastelets of Quebec City. His wages were 75 pounds a year, 24 of which was to be paid immediately as a deduction for the first year, possibly for his passage. He would receive one pair of shoes every year. He would also be fed and the contract included the laundry and ironing of his clothe. Transportation costs in both directions, was to be paid by the employer.



Crédit photo : Gilmond Mercier

The Mercier House at 413 Côte Sainte-Anne in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. The monument is honouring Julien Mercier and Marie Poulin.

In June 1647, he boarded the 70-ton sailing ship “La Marguerite”, owned by Pierre Le Gardeur and Noël Juchereau. He left the port of Aunis near La Rochelle with his companions: Jacques Le Roy, Jacques Poupar, Pierre Aloignon, Jacques Loiseau, Martin Huan and Pierre Tremblay. The sailing ship arrived in Quebec City on August 6th after a long crossing of the Atlantic that lasted almost two months.

When Julien arrived in New France, the trading posts of Quebec City, Trois-Rivières and Ville-Marie (Montreal) were mere villages. The total immigrant population of New France was less than 2,000. The new colony lived under constant threat from the Iroquois.

At the first official census in 1666, nineteen years after Julien’s arrival, the total population of the colony was 3,418 inhabitants distributed as follows: Quebec City 555, Beaupré 678, Beauport 172, île d'Orléans 471, Sillery 217, Montreal 584 and Trois-Rivières 461.

On July 22, 1649 under a contract signed before Laurent Bermen, notary, Julien hired himself out as a servant for Michel Huppé, also known as La Croix, who had been managing for 3 years the Seigneurie of the Jesuits of Notre-Dame-des-Anges (on the site of the Hôpital Général of Quebec City). On October 18th of the same year, he left his employment amicably, with a note signed by Jesuit Father La Place authorizing Julien to purchase 60 pounds worth of goods in the store. What he did during the next two years is unknown.

On October 7, 1652 Julien signed a marriage contract at the Poulin house, before Notary Aubert, with Marie Poulin, daughter of Claude Poulin and Jeanne Mercier. The couple, who had married in Quebec City on August 8, 1639 had returned to France in 1641, but had later come back to Quebec City in 1648. The witnesses were Charles Boivin and Guillaume Pépin. The contract stipulated that the future father-in-law, a carpenter by trade, was to build Julien a barn 40 feet long by 20 feet wide and 8 feet high below the beams, and that Marie will have linens and crockery as needed. The future wife (Marie) was only 11 years old and consequently, the marriage would not happen until January 18, 1654 “following publication of the banns on December 28, 1653 and on January 8, and 11, 1654; Father Paul Ragueneau, a Jesuit, had the marriage certificate filed at Notre-Dame-de-Québec, writing that he had solemnly married them in the home of Robert Guiguier”. Marie Poulin, born in Trois-Rivières January 1, 1641 would be one of the very few ancestors to have been born in New France, then spend her childhood in France and later found a family in North America.

On October 15, 1651 Julien obtained from Olivier Letardif a land concession on *Côte de Beaupré* at Sainte-Anne-du-Petit-Cap. The land was near the site of the present-day basilica. It was about 950 feet wide by four and a half miles deep. That piece of land was well identified and corresponds to lot numbers 81, 82 and 83, plus part of lot no. 84 in the land register for Sainte-Anne.

Around the age of 40, in 1661, Julien was stricken with a debilitating disease “which seemed to make him dry up and waste away completely” according to Father Thomas Morel. “After offering a few masses and not finding any relief from human remedies, Julien entrusted his life to Sainte-Anne and was completely healed”. That same year, when his adoptive parish refurbished its church, Julien donated wheat, peas and barley for a total value of 18 pounds. At the time of the 1667 census, he owned five head of cattle and 16 acres of farm land. In 1669, he was appointed church warden for the parish and held the position for two years. Upon leaving the position, he donated six pounds and four shillings.

On October 18, 1676 after 22 years of marriage, Julien died at the age of 55. Father François Fillon performed the funeral ceremony on October 19th, at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. Marie, then only 35, was pregnant with twin girls who were born four months later: Marguerite and Angélique.

In 1682, after being a widow for almost six years, Marie decided to remarry, with Charles Montmigny also known as Jouvent. He was her son Jean’s father-in-law. She recorded the inventory of her property with Notary Aubert, and was helped in that task by her two neighbours, Étienne Lessard and Robert Giguère. The farm animals included four draft oxen, four cows, one calf and eight hogs. There were 150 bushels of wheat and 14 bushels of peas in the granaries. The land and farm buildings were valued at 2,000 pounds.

Marie Poulin passed away on July 16, 1716 at the age of 75 in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, two weeks after the passing of her second husband Charles Montmigny. She was buried the following day.

The couple, Julien and Marie, had ten children, born between 1656 and 1677: six boys and four girls. Only five of their sons married and thus helped perpetuate the name Mercier in North America. In order of age we have: Paschal (1656), Charles (1658), Louis (1662), Jean (1667) and Pierre (1671). Ninety percent of all the Merciers in North America came from the line of the ancestral couple of Julien Mercier and his wife Marie Poulin.

Paschal, the eldest of the family, and his wife Anne Cloutier, raised three sons who colonized the Côte-du-Sud, Berthier, Bellechasse, etc.. Their offspring were very prolific and their descendants spread out towards Île d'Orléans, Repentigny, Pointe-aux-Trembles, Montreal, and elsewhere in Quebec, as well as in the rest of Canada and the United States.

Jean married Barbe Monmainier and one illustrious descendant of that couple was Honoré Mercier, who was Premier of Quebec from early 1887 to the end of 1891.

Louis made a name for himself in several ways. He was one of the most renowned locksmiths of his time and his was a very important trade in those days. Between 1685 and 1694, he trained three apprentices, and is listed in "*Les armuriers de la Nouvelle-France*". His three wives Marguerite Rabouin, Anne Jacquereau and Louise Simon gave him 14 children, among whom were eight sons. Three of them became priests and each of these had a different mother. The first priest became head of the Beaumont parish but he died during an epidemic in 1715. The other two did missionary work along the Mississippi River, in the southern part of the United States. One of those two died in that region, but the other one came back to serve the Church in Quebec.

Here are a few well known descendants of the couple Julien Mercier and Marie Poulin: Honoré Mercier Premier of Québec, comedians Claudine Mercier and Jean-François Mercier, actor Denis Mercier and journalist Catherine Mercier. Two famous Quebec singers are not named Mercier, but they are connected directly to the family of Julien through their fathers and their mothers: Céline Dion and Diane Tell (Diane Sophie Fortin).

References:

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