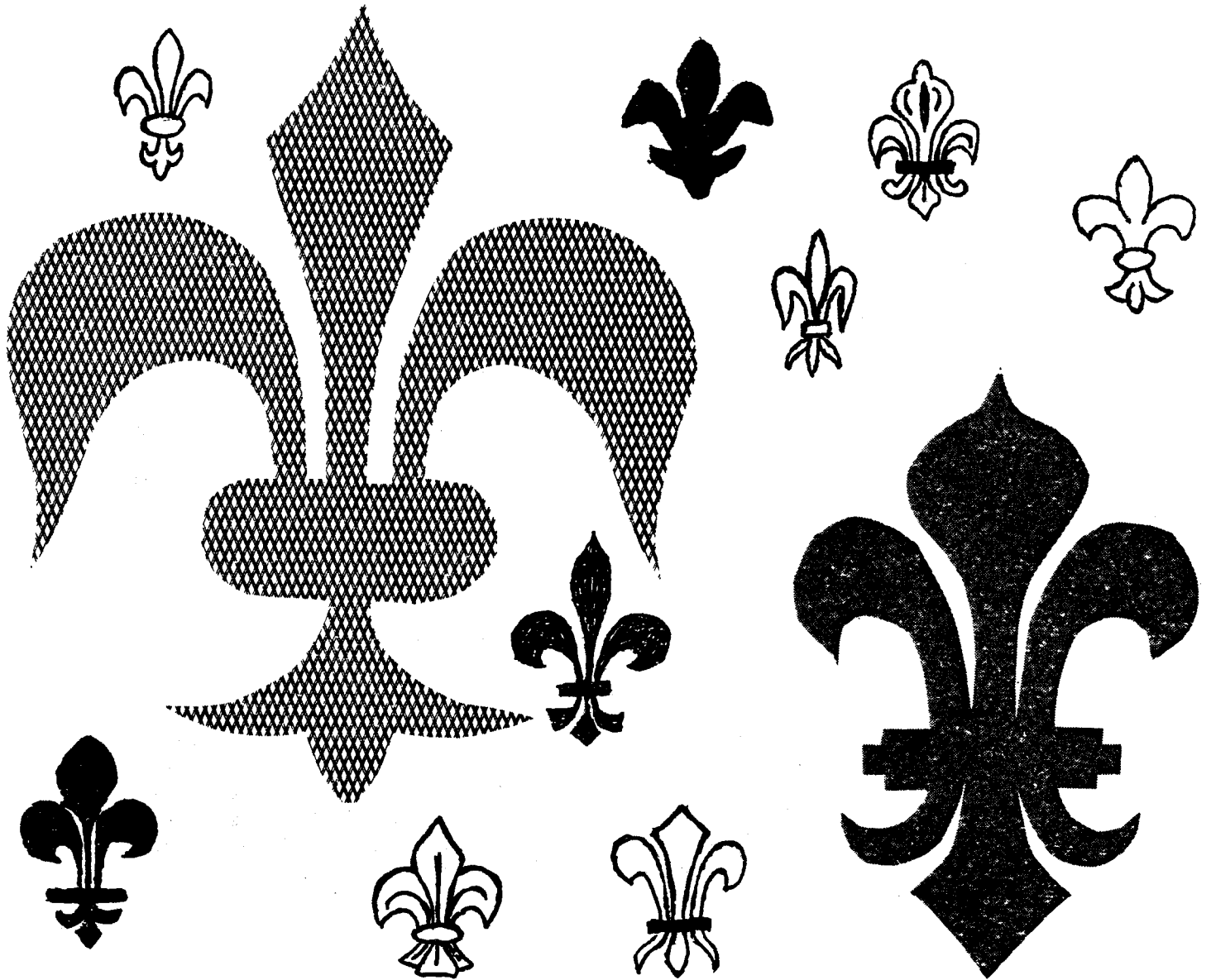


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TEC CORNELIUS AUBRY:
AN IRISH HABITANT IN NEW FRANCE

-- John P. DuLong

Not all of our habitant ancestors were French. There was always an ethnic mixture in New France. In 1663, for instance, there was in Canada an Englishman, a Scotchman, an Irishman, a Swiss, and two Walloons.¹ Leafing through the pages of Pere Tanguay's Dictionnaire Genealogique, the reader will find that several ancient French-Canadian families were founded by Germans, Italians, Englishmen, Portuguese and persons of other nationalities.² Some of these foreigners came as pioneers or soldiers; others were brought to Canada as captives taken in raids on neighboring colonies.

Almost from the beginning of New France's history there have been Celtic-Irish and Scottish settlers. For example, Abraham Martin was nicknamed "The Scot". Martin was among the premier colonists in New France. His nickname indicates that he was Celtic. However, we cannot be completely sure that he was Scottish and not Irish, since the French sometimes called Irishmen Scots and "Martin" often occurs as an Irish name.³

Many of the Celts who came to settle in New France were from Ireland. It is difficult to judge what percentage of the Canadian population may have been Irish. However, O'Farrell estimates that of the 2,500 families in Canada at the end of the 17th century almost 100 were natives of Ireland and in about another 30 families either the husband or the wife was from Ireland.⁴ He presents evidence and argues that many of these Irishmen had come to New France as soldiers in the Carignan-Salieres regiment or later in the battalions that fought for Montcalm.

¹Marcel Trudel, La Population du Canada en 1663 (Montreal: Fides, 1973), p. 30.

²Cyprien Tanguay, Dictionnaire Genealogique des Familles Canadiennes, 7 vols. (Montreal: Eusebe Senecal, 1871-1890; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1969), vol. 1, p. 15.

³John O'Farrell, "Irish Families in Ancient Quebec Records," The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society 28 (1929-30): 157-172, p. 160.

⁴Ibid., p. 157.

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One of the Irish settlers in New France was Tec Cornelius Aubry. He may have been in Canada as early as 1663 at Montreal.⁵ He appears on the census of 1667 as Tecle Cornelius, 29 years of age, a servant of Andre Dumets and Marie Chedeville of Montreal.⁶ At Quebec on 10 September 1670 Tec married Jeanne Chartier, the daughter of Pierre and Marie Gaudon. Jeanne was from St-Honore, Paris. She came to Canada as a "fille du Roi" and her dowry included a 50 livre gift from the King.⁷

It is from the record of Tec's marriage at Quebec that we learn of his Irish heritage.⁸ The parish register informs us that Tec Aubrenam was a habitant on the Assomption River. His parents were Connehair Aubrenam and Honore Jeannehour. Tec's birthplace is recorded as the parish of St-Patrice (St. Patrick), the village of Diasony (also spelt Diasonyoen or Diasonyden), Ireland. He was born there sometime between 1632 and 1638.

Tec next appears in 1681 in the census of the Seigneurie de la Chenaye (Lachenaie).⁹ He is listed under the name Jacques Tecaubry, age 45, with his woman Jeanne Chartier, also age 45, and their four children: Madeleine, 10; Marie, 8; Jean, 5; and Francois, 4. Tec owned five arpents of land and five horned animals.

According to Pere Tanguay, Tec and Jeanne had seven children in all.¹⁰ Madeleine-Therese, born at Montreal in 1671, was married twice: (1) Jean Capet (Capel) on 14 November 1696 at Varennes, and (2) Olivier Laisne on 24 November 1700 at Montreal. Catherine (perhaps the Marie of the 1681 census) was baptized on 20 August 1673 at Montreal. Jean-Cornelius was baptized at Pointe-aux-Trembles of Montreal on 23 January 1675. Jean-Baptiste was baptized on 25 May 1676 at Pointe-aux-Trembles. Francois was baptized on 31 October 1677 at Pointe-aux-Trembles and married to Jeanne Bouteiller on 23 September 1708 at Montreal. Genevieve was baptized on 22 October and buried on 5 November 1679 at Pointe-aux-Trembles. And finally, Etienne was baptized on the 9th and buried the 28th of February 1681 at Repentigny.

⁵Trudel, op. cit., p. 294.

⁶Benjamin Sulte, Histoire des Canadiens-Francais, 1608-1880, 8 vols. (Montreal: Wilson and Cie, 1882-84), vol. 4, p. 78.

⁷Elmer Courteau, "The King's Daughters (Fourth of a series)", Lost in Canada? 3 (January, 1977): 21-25, p. 23.

⁸"LaFamille Aubrenam ou Aubry," Le Bulletin des Recherches Historiques 40 (November, 1934): 641-644.

⁹Sulte, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 65.

¹⁰Tanguay, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 15.

Tec's last appearance in Canadian records was at Pointe-aux-Trembles on 24 November 1687 in the notice of his burial at 55 years of age.¹¹ Many French-Canadians now carry Tec's surname through descent from his son, Francois Aubry.¹²

This is essentially all the information we know about Tec. But even these facts are confusing. His name changes several times in the various records and reports: Tec, Tecle, Teague, and even Jacques. His surname has been recorded several ways: Aubrenam, Aubrennan, Aubry, Aupri, Obry, and Tecaubry. Clearly the French were trying to make the spelling and pronunciation of his Irish name conform to their language. The names of Tec's parents also present some difficulty. His father's name was undoubtedly Connor O'Brennan, but his mother's name is unclear.

There is also some discrepancy about Tec's birthplace in Ireland. A search of Irish maps and gazetteers does not reveal a village named Diasony or its variants. The priest who married Tec, Pere de Bernieres, the Superior of the Seminary of Quebec, may have misunderstood Tec's Irish (Gaelic) pronunciation of his place of origin and probably had to guess at how to spell it in French.

I became curious about Tec's name, his birthplace, his parents, and the reason for his migration to New France. Information about him from Canadian resources did not answer all my questions. I decided to write a letter to the Ordnance Survey Office in Dublin--which makes the maps for Ireland--in hopes that it would be able to locate Tec's birthplace. I did not expect much from this query but to my surprise I received an encouraging reply from Kenneth Bale, the Higher Placename Officer. He advised me that there was no town in Ireland by the name Diasony or its variants. However, he asked for a copy of a document in which the village's name occurred so that he might be able to get a better clue from its contents. I rushed him a copy of Tec's marriage record.

Several weeks later a letter arrived from Alan Mac an Bhaird, Ph.D., Ordnance Survey Office.¹³ In this brief two-page letter Mac an Bhaird makes several very interesting educated guesses about Tec's birthplace and name. Unfortunately, his statements can only be taken as intriguing conjectures since we lack documentation. Nevertheless, he presents some leads to Tec's place of origin and heritage which can guide further research.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., vol. 2, p. 67-68.

¹³ Alan Mac an Bhaird to John P. DuLong, 1 October 1979, Ordnance Survey Office, Phoenix Park, Dublin, Ireland.

According to Mac an Bhaird, Diasony may not be a village but a name that designates a larger unit. County Kerry, south of the Main river, was known in English as Desmond's country in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was so named because it had been the Norman-Irish Earl of Desmond's property.¹⁴ In Irish it was known as Deasumhain (pronounced Deasuin) and its classical spelling was Deasmhumhain. This may have been the place name Tec spoke in Irish and Pere de Bernieres wrote as best he could in French, mistaking the general area for a specific town.

Furthermore, the parish of St. Patrick may also have been an error. There are five St. Patrick parishes in Ireland. They are situated in the cities of Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, and Kilkenny, but these appear to be ruled out by the context of the marriage record. Mac an Bhaird suggests that perhaps "... de Bernieres, thinking in terms of 17th century France that 'la paroisse de St-Patrice' was interchangeable with 'l'eglise de St-Patrice' put down the former in the place of the latter."¹⁵ Mac an Bhaird goes further to propose that the mistaken parish/church of St. Patrick might be represented by the Irish Cill Phadraig or Teampall Phadraig. He points out that there is a townland called Kilpatrick (Cill Phadraig) in the parish of Kenmare, east of the town Kenmare, County Kerry, which is within "Desmond's Country". However, as he observes, whether this Kilpatrick corresponds or not to Tec's parish of St. Patrick remains to be proven.

These speculations concerning Tec's place of origin are of value alone, but Mac an Bhaird went further and provided information about Tec's name and his parents' names. Tec Cornelius Aubrenan's Irish name would be Tadhg mac Conchuir Ui Bhraonain; that is, Tadh son of Conchur O Braonain (or, in English, Teighe Connor O'Brennan). Tec probably got the middle name Cornelius because it was a very common latinization of Connor. As Tec's name suggests, his father's name was Conchur O Braonain, or Connor O'Brennan. His mother's name, Honore Jeannehour in French, represents in Irish Onora Ni Chonchuir, or Honora O'Connor.

A weak confirmation of Tec's birthplace in County Kerry is that the combination of an O'Brennan and an O'Connor may have possibly--but not exclusively--occurred there since both septs of these clans could be found in south or central Kerry.

With the valuable conjectures that the Irish Ordnance Office and Mac an Bhaird have so kindly provided we can perhaps try to do some further speculation about Tec's migration to New France.

¹⁴ Seumas Mac Manus, The Story of the Irish Race (New York: Devin-Adair, 1921), p. 353.

¹⁵ Alan Mac an Bhaird, op. cit.

There have been many reasons for the immigration of the Irish to America and Canada; for example: English tyranny, the 1845 potato famine, evictions, and unemployment. In Tec's day the motivation for leaving Ireland may have been due to Cromwell's invasion.¹⁶ Oliver Cromwell--the Puritan Lord Protector of the English Commonwealth--was in Ireland from August 1649 to May 1650. He came to Ireland to suppress a rebellion the Irish had started in 1641. Cromwell left a trail of blood and destruction behind him. The most hideous atrocity was the siege of Drogheda, which resulted in the massacre of about 4,000 men, women and children. When the Irish eventually surrendered at Galway in May 1652, many of them were permitted to embark for the continent of Europe. It is estimated that some 34,000 left to join the Irish brigades that fought in the service of France, Poland, or Spain.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the further settlement of the English in Ireland made the country a very dangerous and oppressive place for the Irish to live. We have no evidence that Tec, or his father, were among any of the soldiers who went to Europe. But it is very likely that the events in Ireland during Cromwell's invasion may have had some impact on Tec's decision to become an emigrant.

Another consideration at this period may have been that the O'Brennans of Kerry had been chiefs of Dunkerron (near Kenmare) and followers of the O'Sullivan Mor clan.¹⁸ The O'Sullivan's estates were confiscated in the 17th century and many of them went to the continent. Perhaps the O'Brennans followed their leaders to France.

According to one "respectable tradition", the O'Brennans may have immigrated to Brittany, France, with several other Irish families to be free to live in the Catholic faith of their ancestors.¹⁹ Brittany may very well have been on Tec's path to Canada. It probably made sense for his family to migrate there since the Bretons were also Celtic and they shared many traditions with their Irish cousins. Also, Brittany was one of the French provinces that sent settlers to New France in the 1650s.²⁰ Tec's possible presence in Brittany does make some sense.

Tec may have come to Canada for the same reasons that motivated the French: for land and property on the St. Lawrence, for adventure in the fur trade, or to escape from feudal dues. It is difficult to know what motivations our ancestors had in coming to New France. However, it was probably better to be a habitant in New France than a peasant in Old France. Certainly, for Tec, it was a vast improvement over being a hunted and harassed Irishman in Puritan-controlled Ireland.

¹⁶ Giovanni Costigan, A History of Modern Ireland (New York: Pegasus, 1st paperback ed., 1970), pp. 70-82.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 77. MacManus, op. cit., p. 429.

¹⁸ Captain Patrick Kelly, Irish Family Names (Chicago: O'Connor and Kelly, 1939; reprint ed., Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1976), pp. 7 and 109.

¹⁹ "La Famille Aubrenan," op. cit., p. 642.

²⁰ Trudel, op. cit., p. 36.

Tec's decision to come to Canada, for whatever reason and along whatever path, resulted in the establishment of an Irish family which became assimilated into Quebec society. Tec now has many descendants in Quebec, Canada, and the United States who assume that they are only French-Canadian. Hidden in their ancestry is an Irish habitant.

Although our present knowledge about Tec is limited to Canadian records, we have some speculations upon which to base further research. A search of the genealogical records in Dublin might lead to more information that could confirm some of these conjectures and tell us more about the Irish heritage of many French-Canadians.

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THE FLEUR-DE-LIS

-- James P. LaLone

Our cover this month shows the '*fleur-de-lis*', meaning flower of the lily. This symbol is most commonly associated with the French. On the provincial flag of Quebec there are four *fleur-de-lis* on a blue background separated by a white cross so that there is one in each quadrant of the flag.

This symbol has a long and ancient history. There is some argument over its origin and meaning. A couple of early legends concerning its introduction to France are that Clovis, King of the Franks, before the Battle of Tobiac in 496 A.D., dreamed that the golden toads on one of his banners changed to lilies. The other legend states that Clovis was given a lily by an angel after accepting Christianity. The lily is often associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary and is one reason for the strong devotion that the French have for her. 'Clovis' is an early form of 'Loys' or 'Louis' and some experts think that the symbol was known as the flower of Louis. In any event, it became a prominent symbol and even Charlemagne used it. By 1376 Charles V chose three *fleur-de-lis* for his coat of arms, which became the official national symbol of France.

The *fleur-de-lis* itself looks more like an iris than a lily, and in fact the iris, until comparatively recent times, was known by the name of a lily. There are only two heraldic flowers in the proper use of the term--the lily and the rose.

For further reading, see the articles on "*FLEUR-DE-LIS*", "Flags", and "Quebec" in World Book Encyclopedia; Heraldry: Sources, Symbols and Meaning, by O. Newbecker; Art of Heraldry, by A. Fox-Davis; and "The Fleur de Lys", by G. Bellew, in Coat of Arms, An Heraldic Quarterly Magazine, v. 1, #6, p. 183 (April 1951).