

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

Volume 2, Number 30

By Damon Veach

SURNAME RESEARCH: One of the most important things we learn in genealogical research is the meaning of and the source of surnames. Haven't you ever wondered about this? Most of the time there are wonderful stories to be learned here. Whether this is all learned from extensive research or just by discussing it with older relatives, it is still an important part of the genealogical process. Tracing the origins of these names will provide you with lots of information on early family ties.

Along the way, you will learn that many of the surnames have numerous spellings, and these spellings can definitely place origins in perspective. For instance, take Veach as an example. Would you associate that to its origin in France? Right away, you might answer no, but a little research will show you not only the evolution of the name but all the places where the family groups lived.

William La Vache signed the Ragman Rolls in 1296, which led to the discovery of the family connection to the Norman Invasion of 1066. However, the name didn't just jump to its present spelling without some changes along the way and also with the help of a few individuals who decided to change the spelling.

In Scotland, the name became Veitch, and this is evident as the name appears on the family castle along with the crest and coat of arms. Vache is cow in French, so this became the symbol for the crest and coat of arms. Since La Vache is feminine, it can be used in a number of ways. A maladie de la vache folle is mad cow disease, or vache laitiere merely means dairy cow. It can be used as a noun, adverb, and adjective, and yes, even as slang.

The first Veach to come to the United States was James "the sheriff" Veitch, first sheriff of Maryland. The spellings within the U.S. are many, but I find that these changes came about in a number of ways. Census takers, workers in court houses, or other individuals with no family ties wrote down the names, and the spellings sometimes took on new forms immediately. Lack of education with proper spellings also played a part in this. It would seem that the Veach family that went into Kentucky became Veech due to census records, and those that went through Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio often spelled it as Veatch.

Family tradition has it with my own lineage that one of my ancestors thought the "t" made it sound too Dutchy, so he dropped that letter making it Veach. Those members of the family who came over to Kansas retained this spelling, and you have this spelling down to the current day. I have written articles under the name Andre

La Vache, a conversion from Andrew (my middle name) Veach. Whatever the spelling may be, there are a number of reasons for the changes.

You can see by what I have written thus far that a lot was learned from doing research on the family name. All of this came about not just in researching the name but in tracing each member and then having to prove that this was the actual lineage. Spelling changes make research difficult at times, but it is important to record all these to maintain the accuracy of the history of your own direct lineage. My historical spelling might be slightly different from another family member, but the descent is the same, all from James the Sheriff.

Surname organizations are important too, and tips can lead you into hundreds of different groups – English, Irish, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Canadian, Polish, and Jewish origins. The most popular names in the U.S. confirm this.

A family name or surname is one that is passed from one generation to the next, and in many cultures, a woman adopts her husband's family name when they are married. The Chinese were among the first cultures to adopt the use of hereditary surnames. In European countries, these names came about in the 12th century, but it didn't catch on right away. It took several centuries before the majority of people had one. The primary purpose of the surname was to be able to distinguish one person from another. In the 13th century, a good number of the males had the names James, William, and Richard, so it was difficult to tell one from the other. This started the unique way of adding descriptive terms, such as William the cook (thus Cook), William the son of Andrew (leading to Anderson), or William from the brook (thus Brooks). These soon became inherited names.

Locations also became surnames, such as Hill, Woods, or Ford. Nicknames also became surnames such as Young, Long, and White. Occupations also came into play. Even famous people furnished ways to create surnames, such as with Alexander the Great, and thus the Alexander surname. Even first names and place names were patterned from old records of people and places. Bynames also have their place in the history of surnames. A byname is a secondary name that was used to further identify a person. They were often nicknames as can be seen in Erik the Red. Patronyms would be something like Johnson (son of John). A matronym would be one derived from the name of the mother or another maternal ancestor.

The American Name Society was founded in 1951 to promote onomastics, the study of names and naming practices, both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Their purpose is to find out what really is the meaning of the name and to investigate the cultural insights, settlement history, and linguistic characteristics revealed within the names.

A coat of arms was also another way for identification of families or individuals. They were often displayed on armor. These were adopted and names derived from them. The crest was used to make up the coat of arms. The crest for the Veach

family is a cow head, and the coat of arms has this and three cow heads on a shield. Faman estendimus factis is the family motto or “We extend our fame by our deeds.”

Following through on all phases of my own family history, I learned a lot about my ancestors – where they lived, what they did, their occupations and locations, and their involvement in the history of this country and others. This is one of the beauties of doing family research. You are able to see and live history through the actions of your ancestors.

Years ago, I carried my children to Brandywine Battlefield and Museum in Pennsylvania. I wanted them to see and experience the excitement of being where their ancestor Jean de Melet fought in the American Revolution, and to stand under that old tree where he may have sought shade or protection. It was an exceptional experience for me because I had not ever expected to be able to do this, but my research made it possible. And this too was made possible when I was transferred to this area with the job I held at the time. It also made it possible for me to do research in the National Archives, visit other places where my ancestors lived, and to learn about the area firsthand. It gave me a chance to learn why my ancestor chose to fight with the Americans and leave his legacy with the Mellett family, the U.S. spelling in later records.

Genealogy is a journey into the past and one that can be filled with great rewards as you discover new things about your family. It never ends. I started this many years ago, and I continue to uncover wonderful items about my family that I can share with my children and others interested in the Veach lineage or allied lines. The journey is long and requires a lot of hard work, but the rewards are priceless.

(Note: You can find a related article in Volume 1, Number 15 of this series. Pictures of the family castle and the crest can be seen here.)

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