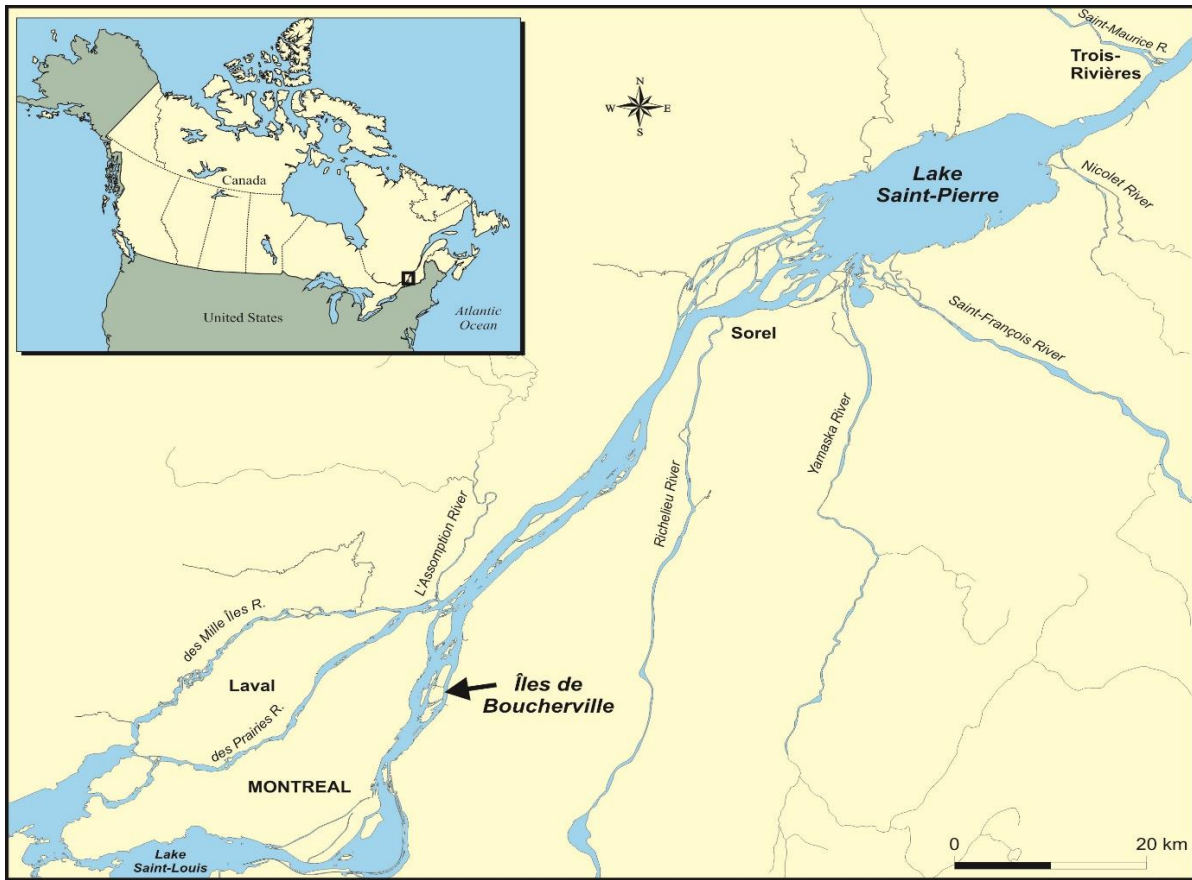


In Search of Cousins: French-Canadian Connections



The St. Lawrence River Valley

Our French ancestors emigrated from France in the 17th century to colonize New France as soldiers, voyageurs and farmers mostly along the St. Lawrence River. They followed the transportation network of rivers and lakes farther and farther inland to claim the land for France, to barter with the Indians for the precious beaver pelts, and to farm the ribbon-shaped plats along the rivers. The relentless search for more pelts and more farmland drew our ancestors from Montreal, Sorel and Three Rivers, important ports on the St. Lawrence River, to the rivers and lakes of Minnesota.

In the 19th Century, some of these French Canadians chose an area just north of St. Paul where the land was fertile and the lakes teemed with fish and game. The village was given the name of Hugo after the famous French novelist, Victor Hugo, author of Les Misérables and The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Hugo is where my grandparents, my mother, and dozens of her cousins were born. Whenever I visited with my mother, one of her favorite things to do was to visit the cousins she grew up with. But now that generation has passed away, and the identity of Hugo as a small village made up mostly of families that emigrated from the St. Lawrence valley where French was spoken at home and on the street has also disappeared.

One way to claim the heritage of this sweep of history as our own is to understand what roles our many cousins played in this centuries-long historical drama. This section, "In Search of Cousins,"

introduces some of these cousins and tells how the stories of their families relate to our family's history.

The communities of our French-Canadian ancestors were composed of inter-related families. The number of French immigrants who colonized New France from whom millions of French Canadians are descended is relatively small. So, whenever we meet a fellow descendant, the chances are good that we are distant cousins or members of our family are distant cousins. My Aunt Jesse Peloquin Peltier noted that her mother, Edwige Peloquin, married her father, Calix Peloquin, but that her mother was from a different Peloquin family. Further genealogical research showed that this is not exactly true. Yes, her parents were not first or second cousins, but they were indeed both descended from François Peloquin many generations earlier.