

THE FIRST NATURALIZED CANADIAN.

So far as is known, the first person to be naturalized in Canada was a married woman by the name of Mary Derizy, née Willis, a native of New England. On January 27th, 1922, at Paris the following is recorded [I translate]:

This day, the King being in Council, Sieur Pierre Derizy, Merchant of Quebec, having represented to His Majesty that he had in the year 1704 married Mary Willis, a native of the City of Esteval in New England where at the age of eight, she was taken prisoner by the Abenaki Indians and taken to Quebec where she was educated in the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion of which she made profession; and that being settled with her family in the said City of Quebec, the said Willis being joined to him in the bonds of matrimony had no other intention than to end her days in Canada or in such other parts of the Kingdom as the business of the said Derizy, her husband, should call him, if His Majesty should be pleased to accord her the same privileges as his other subjects. His Majesty, by the advice of Monseigneur, the Duke of Orleans, Regent, willing to treat the said Willis favourably, recognizes, holds, considers and admits her in the number of His true subjects and denizens of His Kingdom, wills that as such she may at her option reside in Canada and other parts of the Kingdom, countries, lands and dominions in the obedience of His Majesty and that as she may desire, she may enjoy the privileges, franchises and liberties enjoyed by His true and original subjects.

His Majesty gives command to all the Superior Council at Quebec and all other His Officers and Justices concerned that as soon as it should be made to appear to them that the said Willis made profession of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion, they should enregister the present decree and cause her and those claiming through or under her, fully, peaceably and perpetually to enjoy and use the said rights, all interference and prevention ceasing.

[“Esteval” is probably “Westfield.”]

And so it appears that even in 1722, in Quebec, a woman was a “person” at least, if she was a professed Roman Catholic. *Collection de Manuscrits*, etc., Quebec, 1884, vol. iii, p. 73.

Other women did not have such luck. We find (*Ibid.* p. 204) M. Duquesnel writing, September 15, 1744, to Governor Shirley at Boston [again I translate]:

I was very desirous to accord their liberty to the Irishwomen, who were taken prisoner on a merchant ship coming from Ireland by one of our privateers (corsaires). I had them placed upon the packet-boats I send you, and according to what I am told, the English Captain who had had charge of them claims to have still the right to sell them as slaves on their arrival—this is neither just nor regular as they were no longer in his disposition after they had been taken from him.

I beg of you to be good enough also to give them their freedom—anything you can do for them will ever oblige me.

Governor Shirley replied from Boston, October 27, 1744, (*Ibid.* pp. 208, 209):

I have the honour to agree entirely with your sentiments in respect of the Irishwomen to whom you had granted freedom from their engagement, and immediately after their arrival, I ordered the Sheriff to bring them before me, and I have given them the assurance of my protection against the claims of their Captain, and I have given him to understand that if he uses violence to force them into another engagement, I shall be very much annoyed. I have taken care, too, to have them supplied with lodgings and necessaries until they can make provision for themselves as I am informed they are capable of doing.

I do not find the remainder of the story of these Irishwomen—they, of course, were women who, to pay for their transportation to America, were bound to serve for a fixed number of years those to whom the contractors “sold” them: this service was not far removed from actual slavery.

The Abenaki (Abenaki) Indians who captured Mary Willis, were a well-known Indian Tribe, which, taking the French side, more than once ravaged Acadia and New England, especially that part now known as Maine. I presume the capture was made during the operations of the last two decades, of the 17th century, of which some account is given—not too accurate, be it said—in Parkman’s *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, vol. I, chapter XI.

With the story of the New England captive, afterwards naturalized by the French King, may well be compared an equally well authenticated story of another New England girl, captured by the Abenakis, who was admitted into the fold of Mother Church, and lived and died in Canada.

Esther Wheelwright was the great-granddaughter of the Reverend John Wheelwright, who emigrating from England, landed in Boston in May, 1636. Falling out with the Puritan authorities, who, be it said, were quite as intolerant as those from whom they had departed, he with a small group of adherents, founded in succession, Exeter in New Hampshire and Wells in Vermont. Esther Wheelwright, daughter of John, the grandson of the original immigrant, was born in Wells in 1696, four years after the people of that town had repelled an attack of the Abenakis, the well known Indian tribe which had attached themselves to and were a faithful ally of the French. The attack was renewed in August, 1703, and with success. Many of the defenders were slain and thirty-nine taken

captive, amongst them, Esther, then seven years of age. She was taken to the depths of the forest toward the headwaters of the Kennebec and there was adopted as a daughter by the Abenaki warrior who had taken her prisoner. There she lived for five years, and forgot her mother tongue, so that when addressed in English by Bigot, the Jesuit Missionary, who recognized by her complexion that she was of white parentage, she was unable to reply. His attempts to take her from her adopted home and people failed more than once, but at length, the Missionary succeeded in buying her from her master and bringing her to Quebec. There she was received by the Governor, the Marquis de Vaudreuil and his lady, became the companion—almost a sister—to their daughter, Marie-Louise, in the Ursuline Convent, and was educated in the Convent, becoming a fervent Catholic.

An exchange of prisoners was being arranged, but Esther refused to be sent away. She joined the Ursulines, as did two other New Hampshire captives, Mary Ann Davis, of Salem, Massachusetts, set free by Père Rasle and Dorothy Gordon bought by Père Aubery. She was elected Superior in 1760 of the Convent of Marie de l'Incarnation, and lived beloved and honoured until her death in 1780. "She died," says the Annalist of the Convent, "as she lived, addressing to Heaven continual prayers and repeating without ceasing certain verses of the Psalms."—She had taken the name, La mère de l'Enfant-Jésus.

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