

# The French Family of Jamestown, Kansas

1687 - 1945



From the Records of Gail French Peterson  
Compiled by Martha Peterson, 1993

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Who they were

How they came

Where they came from



With Genealogies, Maps, Photographs and Narrative

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OXFORD COUNTY LIBRARY

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# Foreword

**W**hen my mother Gail French Peterson died in 1982, she left several notebooks of family records with pages and pages of material she had written for an uncompleted history of the French Family who settled in Jamestown, Kansas in the early 1870's. She had spent over thirty years collecting, checking and preparing the contents of these notebooks. She also left boxes of supporting data. This book is an attempt to preserve the data she collected and worked on so painstakingly. The book is written for descendants of the French and related families and for the collections of family histories at the Kansas and the Archives of the Frank Carlson Library at Concordia, Kansas. The book, original manuscripts and supporting records are on file at the Cloud County Historical Society. The Kansas Historical Society, the University of Kansas "Kansas" Collection, the Beloit College Archives and the Stratford Connecticut Historical Society have copies of the book.

The material here covers only a part of Gail French Peterson's records. I plan to edit and publish the materials in several other notebooks about her own family, Nicholas and Caroline French who came to Kansas to homestead in the 1872.

A word of caution about this book is necessary. I have used the materials as my Mother left them checking sources only when there was contradictory information. I have not attempted to complete or revise any of the records or the writing. I was tempted at times to visit England, Connecticut, Vermont, and Canada to locate additional records and background data. I came to the conclusion that I could either publish the material mother had collected or collect more data which like Mother's would be unfinished. The first choice seemed to be the more responsible one.

The genealogical charts are not in the standard form used currently in genealogical research. They are copied as prepared by my mother, a self trained historian, genealogist and typist. She spent hours at her typewriter devising a form that satisfied her. Her chosen form seems clear and adds some details missing in a computerized version.

Finally I am not a trained historian or a devoted genealogist; hence the arrangement of the book and the choice of the material to be included is largely personal preference. I invite any corrections and additions others may be able to make and ask that they make sure their contributions are preserved with the records in the Historical Societies. This has been for me a largely self-taught, learn as you go experience. It has been difficult and frustrating at times; I am glad I made the effort.

I would like to thank Marty Lindsey for her help in preparing this manuscript for publication. I would also like to thank the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters for allowing the use of their facility and equipment.

*Martha Peterson*

Marco Island, Florida

Madison, Wisconsin, 1993

## Introduction

**S**amuel French, son of Samuel and Susannah French, was baptized in Bradford Abbas, England in 1689. He with his wife Mary Price French emigrated to Stratford, Connecticut in the early 1700's. Their grandson John and his wife, Elizabeth, moved to Dorset, Vermont in 1773. Their son Joseph and his wife, Bethia, settled near Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada 1830-31. Their son, the third French named Samuel, and his wife Sarah moved to Fairbury, Illinois in 1868 before going to Kansas to homestead five miles east of Jamestown, Cloud County in 1871. The first five chapters of this book cover the period the then living members of the family spent in each geographical location. The sixth chapter summarizes the lives of the ten children of Samuel and Sarah French until the death of Martha Elizabeth French McCulloch in 1945 who outlived her eight brothers and one sister.

Gail French Peterson (referred to in the text as GFP) used these sources for her records from which I prepared this publication:

1. The French Family Bible. At an undetermined date Samuel Truman French began to record the births, marriages and deaths of the family in the Bible in his own handwriting. After his death his children disagreed on the accuracy of some of the dates, places, names and the spelling recorded often from memory. The first date recorded in that bible is 1790 in Vermont. Martha Elizabeth McCulloch inherited the Bible and updated it until the 1930's. Orville Dutton, her grandson who lives on the Samuel and Sarah French homestead east of Jamestown, has that Bible in 1993. Nicholas Mark French kept his own family Bible which he gave to his daughter, Dencie. Her great granddaughter, Barbara Miller Yates of Craig, Colorado had that Bible in 1992. GFP used the records of the Samuel Truman French Bible which were useful if not always accurate.
2. The Nicholas Mark French Record Book: a genealogy of the family compiled by GFP's father, Nicholas Mark French, son of Samuel French and preserved after his death by his son, Fay S. French. The original was kept in an old-fashioned paper back account book of the kind used then for financial records. Arlene French Tennant, Fay French's daughter, has that book in 1992 in Alameda California; it is not in very good shape as is to be expected after all these years. She, with the help of her husband, Robert, and her son Nicholas made copies for each member of the family in the 1970's. The records in it are largely complete and are accurate until the 1930's. A copy of the book is on file at the Archives in the Frank Carlson Library, Concordia, Kansas. Photostatic copies of four pages of this record are included in the Appendix.
3. Official Courthouse, Township and Cemetery records and newspaper obituaries and other articles from Dorset, Bennington County, Vermont; Ingersoll, Oxford County, Ontario, Canada; Pontiac, Livingston County, Illinois; Cloud County, Kansas collected by GFP in person or through letters. Ted French, great grandson of Samuel and Sarah French collected information about the family from newspapers and other sources. His son Robert reviewed Ted's material and shared it with me.
4. Records of the English and Stratford, Connecticut family obtained from Mrs. Hockey a descendant of Caroline Lawrence, a sister of Samuel French. That research was done by Walter McIntosh of Topsfield, Massachusetts in December, 1968. The Appendix, Section 1, contains copies of that material in its original form.

5. GFP interviews and correspondence with members of the family and neighbors who had known the family and could recall and describe facts, places and people; they gladly related the stories they had heard or been a part of. When GFP began collecting information several of the people who had come with their families to Kansas as children when they homesteaded were still living. GFP checked these interviews carefully with the records and the recall of others who could verify the circumstances. Her brother, Fred, was helpful in these efforts and in drawing maps of places remembered and described.
6. Memorabilia, records, photographs given to her by those who were interested in her work. (I have also received materials of this sort and have found them useful.)

In preparing this publication, I have used paragraphs from articles GFP wrote for the *JAMESTOWN OPTIMIST* and the *CONCORDIA KANSAN*. Her column, "Along the Republican" appeared weekly in the *KANSAN* from the 1930's until the 1980's; she often commented on local history and her own family. She wrote articles on the history of Jamestown and Cloud County for the *OPTIMIST* for ten years or so in the 1930's and 40's. I have also quoted verbatim certain articles she wrote for her projected and unfinished history of the family if those articles added to the narrative.

Historians would classify some of the material in the following chapters as first sources: written records and eyewitness accounts within the grandfather generation life span accepted for historical authenticity. Of the rest, much is colored from telling and re-telling by those who may or may not have been present when the event occurred. The record has been enlivened and expanded by the talents of the person who collected and wrote it, my mother, Gail French Peterson. She was a keen interviewer and reporter. She also had a lively imagination and a gift of words which enabled her to make a story vivid. The direct quotations from her writings included in some of the chapters attest to these abilities. Several of these quotes appeared first in her column "Along the Republican."

The genealogies for the male line of descent with abbreviated material about brothers and sisters of the early French Family is collected under genealogies preceding Chapter I. The genealogies of Sarah Taylor French, David French and Caroline French Lawrence can be found in the Appendix, Section 2.

Maps of England, Connecticut, Vermont, Canada, Illinois and Kansas showing the areas in which the family lived precede Chapter I; detailed drawings of the townships where the family members lived are in the appropriate chapter. Maxine Bennett did the art work on all these maps.

Pictures of members of the family and of reunions are available from the 1870's on. These are included where they add interest and understanding. Chapter VIII contains four reproductions of French Family Reunion Pictures with identification of persons in the picture when possible.

Chapter VIII gives a brief history of Fairview Church.

The Appendix has copies of some of the original genealogical tables, genealogies of allied families as well as copies of official documents including deeds and mortgages, notes as made by Gail French Peterson in doing her research and copies of maps and letters.

The Gail French Peterson Papers on file at the Archives of the Frank Carlson Library at Concordia, Kansas; they contain the materials used for this publication along with other information she had collected. ☞

*Martha Peterson*

## THE CANADIAN FRENCHES: GFP

This is an edited copy of an unfinished manuscript by Gail French Peterson. I have omitted paragraphs that do not contribute to the French family record and have corrected obvious errors in grammar and typing when possible. This material was probably written in 1954 in Lawrence, Kansas the year after GFP visited Canada. The original manuscript is on file at the Cloud County Historical Society. MP

"As I have said before there is no notarized account explaining why Joseph and his family decided to leave Vermont where his forefathers had been solidly established for several generations. To try to give factual accounting of his motives and describe in detail the moving of the family to Oxford County Ontario Canada would be pure fabrication on my part. But I can imagine what took place, can't I?"

(In the next six paragraphs GFP describes a possibility of how Joseph and his family decided to move to Canada. These are omitted since they contribute little to the factual account. Hereafter omissions are indicated by ....)

"From the various records I have examined there is reason to suppose that some of the family, many years before had moved to Canada and all through the years they had been in correspondence and had enjoyed visits back and forth with uncles and cousins living in Canada. Be it remembered that Aunt Patty claimed that her grandfather had six sons who fought in the Revolutionary War and, at its close, they scattered all over the country, some of them going to Canada while her grandfather settled in Vermont.

Who knows now? The ones who were supposed to settle in Canada could have made their home in Oxford County Ontario Canada as well as else where and there are many indications that they did.

We know nothing of the whereabouts of Nichols and Price French, Joseph's brothers after the recording of their births except that in 1800 when the South Village of East Dorset Vermont was laid out, Nichols French was allotted fifty acres.

In checking the Canadian records, through the kindness of Mr. Byron Jenvey of Ingersoll Canada who is compiling early day history of the county I am indebted for the following taken from a small booklet in his possession entitled, "Pioneer Baptist Work of Oxford County Baptist Minister". I quote, "Elder Nicholas French was ordained as a Baptist Minister". In still another place it tells that he was sent for time to time to labor in another county but by 1834 he was resident pastor of the First Baptist Church on Harris Street, Ingersoll Canada. He preached there for many years.

There is not definite proof that this Nicholas French is the brother of Joseph French known as Nichols in Dorset Vermont, but it well could be since there is no record of him in Dorset after 1800 and a note at the bottom of the page in booklet I refer to above states that the Rev. French came to the community after 1816. He would be forty-two years of age at that time and forty nine when he was ordained a minister. In those days ministers started studying for the ministry when they received what they termed a "call" and many of them were much older than ministerial students of today.

Another historical fact that leads me to believe that Nicholas French of Ingersoll is the same as Nichols French, Joseph's brother, is the Jenvey records. Nicholas French was listed on the assess-



ment rolls of 1824 as the owner of 100 acres, 16 cleared, 34 uncleared in the lot 19. Concession 3 West Oxford Township. This farm is immediately south of the Harris Street Cemetery where Nicholas French was pastor for many years and also where Joseph is buried.

(MP note: page 191 of genealogy in Appendix I states Nichols died "prob. 1814". Also the Baptist minister spelled his name Nicholas in the West Oxford Township records. On the map on page 20 a Baptist Church is located near the David French farm.)

Further search of the records as the Courthouse at Woodstock Ont. the county seat of Oxford County revealed that Joseph received 100 acres in 1831 in lot 15, Concession 4 of West Oxford Township which would made the two farms only a couple of miles apart.

No matter how or why Joseph French came to Canada or whether he was the first French of his family to settle there or the last one, that one hundred acres he received from the Crown must have looked like a chunk of heaven to him and Bethia when the last legal document was signed and it was theirs on which to make a home. It was rich black loam, level, covered with luscious grass in the cleared spots and not too heavily timbered where the trees and brush grew. The clearing of this timber would hold no dread for Joseph and his boys reared in the mountains of Vermont and trained to swing an axe skillfully as soon as they were old enough to shoulder one. A hundred acres was more that he had ever dreamed of owning.

On the northwest corner of the west fifty was the spot they chose on which to build the cabin. No roads ran past the place then, only trails criss-crossing the clearings, running from one isolated farmhouse to another and each converging with the main wagon rutted trail leading into Ingersol, then only a small town of 22 families. This cabin of Joseph's, the only house he ever owned, was constructed of great oaken logs, cut from the native timber, placed on a solid foundation of stone. The logs, hand hewn at the ends to make them fit snugly were so large that it must have taken horses or oxen as well as men to lift them into place on the walls. The spaces between were chinked with mortar almost the width of the cracks to make them strong and the house warmer. There might have been two rooms in the house but I remember father talking of only one where they lived and carried on the business of cooking, eating, carding wool, spinning it into yarn and the weaving it into cloth. The loom was set up in the corner of the room with Aunt Patty's bed beside where she always slept winter and summer. As in most cabins those days a ladder by the great chimney fireplace led through a small opening in the attic where the boys slept.

It would be interesting indeed to be able to sleep in the big bed where Joseph and Bethia both ended their last days. One of those old fashioned kind enclosed in a wooden frame. A cover over the top and curtains of homespun that could be drawn about it at night to shut out the cold. There would be a great tick of clean straw on it and in the winter feather beds under them and over them in addition to the homewoven woolen blankets and patchwork quilts of gay colors. Not only father but Aunt Caroline French (David's wife who moved to Kansas after David's death MP), Joseph's daughter-in-law told me of this bed and how day in and day out Bethia and Patty were busy at the loom, the spinning wheel or knitting every minute that they were not employed in household tasks.

There is a sour note that creeps into my thinking as I remember tales of the days when Joseph was head of the house. While he could not hear or speak, he was very sensitive to what went on around him and always reading whenever he had a moment's time. Father remembers him as a very cranky sort of grandfather who liked to lie on the floor in front of the fireplace reading and always he had a supply of willow switches close by that he could expertly wrap about their bare

legs when they came within range of his reach as they played about at grandpa's and grandma's house. His handicap and his extremely pious attitude toward religion probably caused his cantankerousness. No doubt he fully believed that to spare the rod on the child was a sin and a certainty that he would not grow up in fear of the Lord. Years later one finds a dislike for piousness in the French progeny who came under the strict religious discipline Joseph imposed on his household which went so far they could not even cook a meal on Sunday.

If father felt a resentment toward the harshness of his grandfather he leaned far the other way regarding his admiration for his grandmother and Aunt Patty, and if one can judge from photographs as to the goodness of the soul as expressed in a pleasant face, he was justified in his fondness for them. They were both small women, dainty of features, small hands, small feet, both had dark hair combed smoothly back from a center part and of course topped in a fine white lawn cap, trimmed in exquisitely beautiful lace made by hand. Both of their pictures hung in my parent's bedroom when I was a child.

.... (paragraph omitted)

The days of putting up the cabin were busy ones; they hurried from the daylight to dark to get everything ready for winter. ....

Joseph was all of fifty-six years of age by this time .... The house finished they turned now to constructing the barn to house the stock in winter. .... The pasture was laid out west and south of the cabin. Fifteen acres, all fenced as big as all outdoors to Joseph who had known only pocket size patches of grass in Vermont. Long years after, in Kansas, when their pastures reached miles in length, their grandchildren recalling grandfather and the days of their childhood in Canada laughed heartily at the pompous pride Joseph had in the big pasture land. He and the boys split rails and zig-zagged a four rail fence on three sides and built a solid stone wall across the back. Here the prize Merino sheep - all two of them - that they brought from the old home could graze to their heart's content. Here too the team of horses and their one cow found plenty of food. .... By the second summer they were hard at homemaking again. A clump of wild plum trees brought from the timber was planted in one corner of the yard. There wasn't much money but they managed to get a half dozen "boughten" apple, pear and cherry trees to set in a row along the pasture fence. Bethia and Patty had a flourishing garden going as soon as the ground could be worked in the sunniest spot in the clearing west of the house. ....

Those first four or five years ran along smoothly for all of them. Joseph's children had finished school in Vermont. They were well learned in the fundamentals of the three R's. ....

Before five years had passed Joseph became a loyal Canadian, established in the community as a responsible citizen and an accomodating neighbor. He could relax a little now for there would be enough to care for himself and Bethia in their old age. Patty would never marry now the family thought and that would be a comfort and some one to lean upon. About all he needed was the comforts of a good home, the solace of his pipe and time to read. Soon, all too soon, he knew he would not be able to read much longer.

Samuel was the first to break the family circle. He had been going with a girl from over Beechville way, Elizabeth Herrick. It was on June 19, 1836 that they married and until they could get a house built they would live with their families.

When Joseph knew that Samuel was to be married he had told him he could have the northeast twenty-five acres on which to make his home and start farming for himself. They had started the

foundation of the house before the young couple was married. It was located about a hundred yards east of the old homesite, but work went slowly as it was summer and the crops had to be taken care of first. It was just as well they did not get it completed because on November 29, 1836 less than six months after they were married, Elizabeth died suddenly and the project was abandoned.

It must have been about this time that Caroline (French Lawrence) was writing (from Vermont) that they were thinking of joining the rest of the family in Canada. As you remember Abe (Lawrence) first married Mariah and when her son was born in 1826, she died and the following year Abe married Caroline and they remained in Vermont when the family left. Looking over the records, it would seem that for a time Caroline and Abe came as far as Buffalo, New York, in 1834 where one of their children was born and it would be from there that they decided to move to Canada. Their fifth child was born in Canada in 1838. They had eleven children in all .... I have not the foggiest notion where they lived in West Oxford, but they lived there the remainder of their lives and many of their children and grandchildren are also buried there. When I visited last summer the cemetery records had all been destroyed as well as church records and only a few graves of the many French kin buried there could be located. We could not even determine in which cemetery they had been buried.

A year or eighteen months went by after Elizabeth's death and again Sam was hauling logs starting to rebuild the house he had started when first married.

This time he was marrying Adolph Taylor's older daughter Sarah. The Taylors had come to West Oxford from Columbus Ohio sometime between 1826 and 1827. .... Aunt Mat remembered well the account of that trip as told to her by her Grandmother Taylor. There were three children in the family at that time all under five years of age. Little Sarah the oldest was past four, Daniel three and Nicholas less than a year old. The wagon was so full of their household goods that even Rebecca had to ride a horse. She had fixed a bed for the two youngest at the back of the wagon where she could keep an eye on them as she rode along and took Sarah with her, the child riding all the way on front of her mother. The trail was so little used and it passed through dense woods so that many times the men had to go ahead and cut away the branches before they could get the wagon through. Two more children were born to them in Canada but only Betsy lived, the little boy dying in infancy.

Sarah, now grown to womanhood at eighteen was smart as a whip with a fine sense of humor and plenty of spunk, and comely as well .....

Judging from his tin-type Samuel was quite a handsome scamp now in his twenty-fifth year. He had blue eyes, sandy whiskers and full beard with sideburns, both of which wanted to curl slightly. He wasn't a big burly man, about five feet nine, lean and muscular and carried himself well. In contrast to David's less than five feet of height and Joseph's slight figure he appeared a dapper young man striking enough to set a girl's heart thumping in those days when a husband was the aim and ambition of all young ladies.

Right from the start Sarah was a little smart about homemaking. She insisted that they get the house ready before they were married even if it was the busy summer season. So Samuel hurried things along - he never was much to push - and with the help of Joseph and David, sometimes the Taylors and neighbors, it was up and ready before the haying was over.