

DeMerchant Family Reunion - 2003 Draws 400+

by Robert LaFrance

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They came from as far away as China, Brazil, and Belgium and many provinces of Canada and U.S. states to attend the giant DeMerchant Reunion August 1-3, 2003 at the Four Falls farm of Gaylen and Karen (DeMerchant) Sullivan. Over 400 descendants of the first New Brunswick DeMerchant, a Bath man originally known as John Cuffman, came to the weekend event.

The celebration, one that organizer and veteran genealogist Vaughan DeMerchant of Perth-Andover called "the second quinquennial DeMerchant reunion" began Friday evening with registration, greetings, and a corn boil followed by a talk by Norman DeMerchant on the subject of John Cuffman, who was born in 1762 in Pennsylvania.

Vaughan DeMerchant, 54, who began genealogical research after a 1994 stroke, wrote with the help of a computer program called Family Tree Maker, a book called "The DeMerchants of New Brunswick" - in 1998. This work can be found in local libraries and can be purchased locally. In an interview last Friday he said years of research had proven that John Cuffman, who was born in Pennsylvania, was the ancestor of all DeMerchants in New Brunswick.

"I was able to prove that every person with the surname DeMerchant is a descendant of this one man," he said, "my great great, great grandfather John Cuffman of Bath. His German name was Kaufman, which in the German language means 'merchant'. He followed tradition and added 'De' to it because that was the habit of the Pennsylvania Dutch (German immigrants to that state in the eighteenth century). The early census takers couldn't spell his name so they just wrote down Cuffman. In NB it's spelled Cuffman/DeMerchant because he went by both names for a while.

"It took me a year and a half, but I called every DeMerchant in the phone book," he said. He asked about their ancestors and said that by the time they reached their great-grandfathers he could take them back to the 1851 New Brunswick census.

WEEKEND ACTIVITIES

Saturday began with breakfast hosted by the local Masons, followed by a visit to the local Farm Market on Saturday. Day activities included walking tours, farm tours, pontoon boat rides, swimming, a demonstration of wood turning at Donald Pickett's workshop in Hillandale, and games. A 24-foot chart on the descendants of John and Mary (Cuffman) DeMerchant beginning in 1783, together with old picture displays was a focal point for the whole weekend. Tobique-Mactaquac MP Andy Savoy attended and gave his account of his family connections to the DeMerchant clan.

A letter from Premier Bernard Lord noted the importance of the Loyalists in building this province, and "the role of John DeMerchant, who first settled in Carleton County". He spoke of how five generations has become a large international family, all descendants of this one settler.

The oldest descendent was Helen DeMerchant, 96, of Fort Fairfield and second oldest was Natica Gaszi, 93, of Haddonfield, New Jersey. The youngest was four month old John Bolger of Presque Isle. To continue the list of superlatives, one couple was married 69 years ago, the most recently married was the grand-daughter of Stuart and Roberta DeMerchant, Lisa & Dale Riley from Fredericton. The family with most siblings present was that of Vaughan, Bennie, Robert, Harold, and Norma DeMerchant. The parent with the most children and grandchildren present was the oldest descendent, Helen DeMerchant. The descendent who had come the greatest distance was Angela Gordon from Beijing, China.

More details and photos on the reunion and the DeMerchant family can be found at www.demerchant.com on the Internet.